$1.95
A G&T PUBLICATION
SUMMER #5
THE ALL NEW
COLLECTOR'S DREAM
A Fond Look At Women In Comics and Much More!
CRAIG 78

COLLECTOR'S DREAM MAGAZINE

FOR COMIC COLLECTORS AROUND THE WORLD

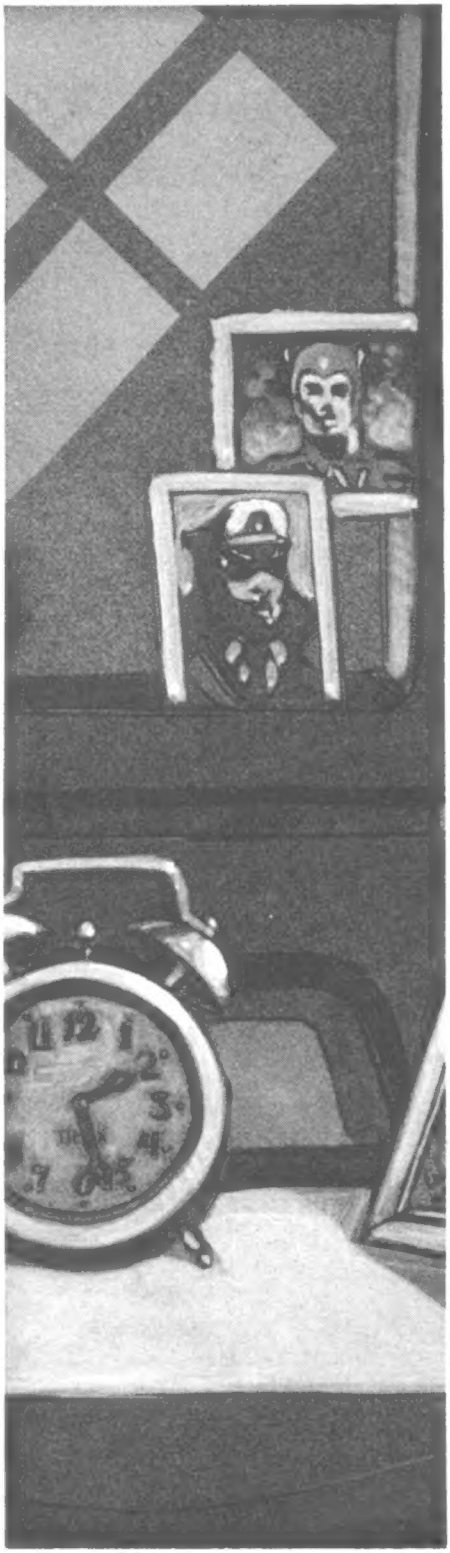
6 PUBLISHER'S
Message—all about this issue's titanic lineup

7 MAIL
Pros and fans comment on our efforts

10 CARTOON
By Nick Poliwko and Tom Nesbitt: comic collecting is just one of many hobbies

11 EDITORIAL
The second and concluding installment of Comic Collecting Is a Small-Time Hobby

18 REPORT TO
the Priesthood—a Marvel Universe genealogy
by Bennet Marks



32 CONVERSATION
with Marvel Comics editor Roy Thomas

42 A GLANCE
At Filipino Comic Art
by Marshall F. Johnson

48 ARKHAM
House Publications: A Collector's Notes
by Rowley Atkins

61 A PRICE GUIDE
To Arkham House Publications

64 A GUIDE TO
Collecting Funk Comics
by John Wooley

Vol. 1 #5 Indian Summer 1978

PRINT RUN THIS ISSUE: 8000 COPIES

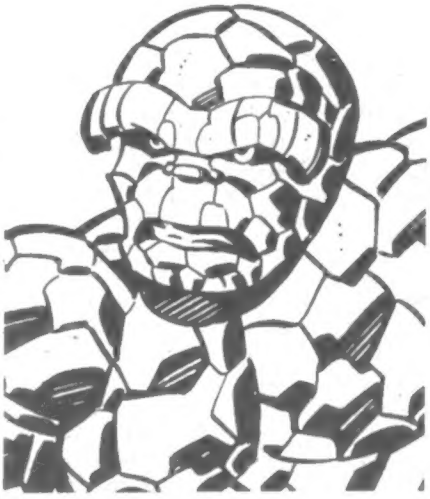
82 COLLECTOR'S
Dream Talks to Jim Steranko

88 NEWSPAPER
Strip Collecting: An Introduction by John Sech

92 BYRON PREISS:
A Collector's Dream Interview

100 ALL THINGS
Lithe and Beautiful. The first of three Wardworld columns by Murray Ward

103 THE CRAZE'S
the Thing. Another column by Murray Ward



105 THOSE
Marvel-ous DCs. The third Wardworld column by Murray Ward

108 IN THE BE-
ginning: The story of the Fantastic Four by Dick O'Malley

114 INTERVIEW
With Johnny Storm, done for Collector's Dream by Dick O'Malley

117 A CHECK-
listing Approach for Comic Fans by Stan Molson

121 PERTWIL-
laby Papers: concluding the first year of Don Rosa and Ron Weinberg's classic strip

INTRODUCING *COLLECTOR'S DREAM* #5

Well, we finally made it! Only six months late—that's why we're (outrageously) calling this the *Indian* Summer Issue of 1978. We originally intended this to have been a catch-up issue (since we had fallen far behind), but we've decided to make every issue a giant blockbuster like this one (arrgh!). We've knocked ourselves out putting this book together, and we believe it shows.

The cover article this issue came to us out of the blue one day last spring, after a brief correspondence with John Wooley. We were struck by the thoroughness of the research and the plenitude of spectacular illustrations. The article clearly demonstrates how *men*, and their seemingly limitless capacity to purchase magazines decorated with suggestively posed women, were exploited by the publishers of the late 1940s. Naturally (heh, heh), to see if this theory really has substance, we asked Jim Craig, local Toronto artist extraordinaire and some time *Master of Kung Fu* penciller, to whip up a cover and some interior illustrations in the 1940s vein, brought up to 1970s artistic standards. They turned out great, even spectacular. So men: *Don't buy this book!* You're being exploited to line our pockets with cash!

For Marvel fans, we have Bennet Marks' incredible Marvel genealogy *cum* Report to the Priesthood. Although not everything in the article is demonstrably *true*, nothing is (yet) demonstrably *false*, either. Watch—and be entertained by—all the rabbits Bennet pulls out of his Marvel hat! And let us not forget Ken Steacy, whose illustrations perfectly complement the text.

We have a three part Fantastic Four history by Dick O'Malley, which we synthesized from a number of Continuity Conundrums columns he sent us. Which reminds us: so far nobody has written us an article about DC Comics that we can use. Hey! There's a *big gap* there in our coverage, crying to be filled by some enterprising writer. Then we won't have to read all those accusatory "Marvel bias" fan letters, either. Tom Bilinsky, Jim Craig, Doug Herring, Larry Houston and Joe Sinnott himself illustrate the article. Next issue Dick returns with an in-depth study of Prince Namor, and Cat Yronwode has written us an article on the Vishantian Cosmology. Lou Mougin will premiere next issue with the first in his series of articles covering the small-time superheroes of the 1960s; they're lots of fun!

Rowley Atkins is a local book collector who specializes in the macabre books of Arkham House, the publisher who collected some of the original Robert E. Howard anthologies, H. P. Lovecraft omnibuses and Clark Ashton Smith collections. The Cthulhu Mythos (we even have a shot of Great Cthulhu himself, drawn by the exquisite pen of Rob MacIntyre) is a cornerstone of weird fiction, and all the Arkham books are prime collector's items among people interested in that specialized branch of fiction. We were able to shoot dozens of Arkham dust wrappers to illustrate the article (some of them came out a bit too dark—but you can at least get the idea; Arkham jackets as a rule are all pretty somber affairs to begin with), the first time such a staggering array of titles has been displayed anywhere. If you look hard, you'll find many rare ones. They're mainly from the collection of Ray Alexander, of Bakka Books here in Toronto, supplemented from the collection of Rowley Atkins. (Thanks, people!)

Marshall Johnson wrote us the article about the Filipino comic scene last year (again arrgh!), but it is still a timely commentary on the state of comic art in that country. A tremendous amount of talent is lost or misused through bad management in the Philippines, and the more people know about it, the more likely the situation is to change.

We have *three* interviews (not counting the one with the Human Torch) this issue, all from the 1977 San Diego Con effort: Roy Thomas, Byron Preiss and Jim Steranko, three of the most professional and progressive talents in the business. Franc Reyes did his usual superlative job on their portraits—an absolute necessity in Byron Preiss' case because only one of his photographs turned out. Next issue we have Jim Craig, John Buscema and Don Glut in our interview lineup.

For collectors on a more pragmatic level, we have two short surveys, one by John Sech on the pitfalls of newspaper strip collecting, the other by Stan Molson on a checklisting system he has devised for keeping track of his books. And we have the usual editorial from George, composed at 2 AM after a full day of pasting up Marvel Indexes. Comments are solicited.

Rounding out this issue are three of Murray Ward's Wardworld columns. These were all written some time ago, and the reader is advised that some of the information is dated. So picture yourself as you were six months ago, before the DC Implosion, when everything looked secure and halcyon, as you read these!

And at the back of the book we have Don Rosa's Pertwillaby Papers. This issue carries the conclusion to the first year of Lance Pertwillaby's adventures. It was originally our intention to continue printing PP through his South American adventure, but on further reflection we've decided to let their publication in *Rocket's Blast/Comicollector* make do. Most fans have seen all the PP episodes from #66 up in that fanzine, but the first 65 had up till now never been reprinted anywhere and thus are hardest to find. We bid a fond adieu to Lance and his friends, and we urge the reader to beg, borrow or steal the RBCC issues which carry the ones following.

Advertisers should check out our new (higher) ad rates. Since we can't by a long shot guarantee regular publication as yet, we advise all prospective advertisers to simply tell us they want space; then we will drop a line when we need the ad and payment. This will assure your very latest ad a place in the book. Also, we had to turn back an appalling number of ads because they were too *messy*; please make sure your ad looks good! We're not going to run any ads which we feel will detract from the finished appearance of the page.

In this vein, let it be known that we are offering a fast-turnaround, low-cost typesetting service. If there is one thing we can do quickly, it is typography, with our own equipment. We'll typeset your ad for a small extra charge if you can't get it done locally—and probably cheaper even if you *can* get it done locally! We have many satisfied customers in Toronto who use our service regularly, and we'll supply references if you like. Let's get some professionalism into this business!

And speaking of typesetting, next issue we will change our primary typeface from Helios to Baskerville. We've been setting *everything* in Helios, and we're just not giving Baskerville enough of a workout. This message, and the editorial, have been set in Baskerville so you can see the difference.

Finally, a note about our dealer survey. It generated mountains of interest (and a second printing!); we have a bunch of letters which comment on it one way or another, a few of which appear in this issue and more of which will appear in #6. Most detailed very specific instances of bad service, but a few came from the dealers themselves. Most instances of bad service stem from being understaffed in an expanding business—something we can fully sympathize with ourselves—and Postal Service delays.

Anyway, here it is. See you with our next blockbuster issue, which will be published from the sunny clime of San Diego, California. Maybe the sunshine will induce the book to appear within a reasonable interval. We're still shooting for quarterly! □

A MESSAGE FROM THE PUBLISHERS

MAIL

Address all correspondence to G&T Enterprises, P. O. Box 127, Station T, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6B 3Z9

POWER COMICS WARNING

Dear George and Tony,

Some time ago I wrote you concerning trouble I was having with an order I placed from an ad *Collector's Dream* #4 carried. I am referring to the Power Comics Company ad. I sent away for the special offer (seven comics) for seven dollars and fifty cents over seven months ago. After writing Power Comics Company several times directly and receiving no reply, I wrote you. You were very nice, and advised me to have my money order, used to pay for the comics, traced, and if it was cashed, to advise Power Comics Company. If they still did nothing, you would see what you could do. Well, PCC did cash my money order and still refused to answer my letters of inquiry (this time with photostat copies of my money order and proof of cashing). I will be taking this up with Postal Authorities and filing a mail fraud suit against PCC. Before I go through with this action, I thought I would write to you again. To file the suit, I will need to photostat a copy of the ad I ordered from and give the publication, address, etc., in which it appeared. I have no intention of getting you guys in trouble, but if I have to file the suit, you will be mentioned, even though I know it's no fault of yours.

So, I would appreciate it if you could do something about Power Comics Company not sending me the seven books I ordered, before I have to consult the Post Office.

LAWRENCE LANEY LOFTIN
204 Gilbert Street
Monroe, Louisiana

First of all, we have seen copies of all the books in the ad (which was run on the back cover of last issue); secondly, the ad was fully prepaid; and thirdly, the person who laid out the ad is a personal friend of ours. Thus we felt the ad was completely legitimate. And in fact, it was. We investigated a bit, and we learned that Power Comics has apparently gone out of business. We also understand that the persons who operated Power Comics owe Street Enterprises a fair amount of money, so we think it's safe to say that they will be keeping a low profile for a while. Let this letter serve as a WARNING: DO NOT ORDER FROM THE AD ON THE BACK COVER OF THE PREVIOUS ISSUE OF COLLECTOR'S DREAM. *Meanwhile, you may expect our full cooperation in your suit, should you decide to proceed with it.*

COMICS ARE FOR KIDS

Dear Collector's Dream,

I like your fanzine. I also like *The Comics Journal*. But what you both seem to ignore is the *child* comic collector.

Some of us young comic readers (I'm twelve) do take comic books seriously. We go to dealers, conventions, etc. We read fanzines. But the way we're being represented in fanzines is like dummies reading *Spider-Man* on the toilet! This infuriates me! Please understand that I may not have a super collection, but I do have some valuable books!

Now, when I read your articles, I can't fully relate to them because you seem to be talking to the person who has every issue of *The Fantastic Four*, or owns a collection of Timelys.

Please, listen to me: we may not be many, but we do exist.

Sincerely,
DANIEL TOVEY
222 Congress Avenue
Lansdowne, PA 19050

P.S.: I think your mag is great! It far surpasses anything *The Comics Journal* has ever done.

Ah, Danny, your letter touches our heartstrings and brings tears to our eyes. Would that all *fans were as concerned with the image of comics as you seem to be! Yes, it is true that we are writing for the serious collector, but it is not true that you must own all those comics in order to be able to appreciate our articles. What we hope will happen, in fact, is that by reading our material, you will want to continue being a comic collector, you will want to pick up those back issues which you are still missing (or in some other way get hold of the stories), and perhaps be inspired to try your hand at writing articles or drawing comics of your own. This is the way the hobby grows. Stay with us; we have a long future ahead of us.*

USEFUL INDEXES

Dear George and Tony,

I'm very satisfied with the six indexes I received from you. These Indexes are particularly useful to us French, because we can now classify all the stories pub-

COLLECTOR'S DREAM MAGAZINE

G&T Enterprises
Publisher

George Olshevsky
Editor-In-Chief

Tony Frutti
Production
Layouts
Subscriptions
Advertising

Jim Craig
Front Cover

Rowley Atkins
Marshall F. Johnson
Bennet Marks
Stan Molson
Dick O'Malley
Don Rosa
John Sech
Murray Ward
Ron Weinberg
John Wooley
Contributing Writers

Tom Bilinsky
Jim Craig
Doug Herring
Larry Houston
Robert MacIntyre
Tom Nesbitt
Nick Poliwko
Franc Reyes
Don Rosa
Joe Sinnott
Ken Steacy
Contributing Artists

G&T Enterprises
Interviews

Tony Frutti
John Harris
Marshall F. Johnson
Robert MacIntyre
Photography

G&T Enterprises
Typography

Journal Printing Co.
Stevens Publishing Co.
Printing

COLLECTOR'S DREAM MAGAZINE is published quarterly by G&T Enterprises, P. O. Box 127, Station T, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6B 3Z9. Return postage in coin must accompany all articles, art, photographs, etc., if they are to be returned; no responsibility can be assumed for unsolicited materials. All letters sent to **COLLECTOR'S DREAM MAGAZINE** will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication and copyright purposes and as subject to our right to edit and to comment editorially. All contributing writers, artists and photographers retain sole copyright of material printed within; all rights are reserved on the entire contents. Subscription rate: 4 issues $7.50. Single copy $1.95, postage 50¢ extra. Printed in the United States of America.

sibility to produce the most interesting, fun-filled event possible. To us, the fan is king, and we work toward each Con with mutual respect for everyone's ideas and creative abilities. To create a forum for interviewers is just one of the spin-offs. To me, comic fandom is a noble brotherhood where creative artistic talent receives the recognition it so richly deserves.

Very best wishes,
SHEL DORF
San Diego Comic-Con
P. O. Box 7531
San Diego, CA 92107

And we had a great time there this year, too. The John Buscema interview we scored will be seeing print in our very next issue. Also, please note that we are moving our operation into your very city (the Con was one of the reasons we chose San Diego), and we're looking forward to making a contribution toward the one in 1979.

ESOTERICA

Dear Editor,

Although I've enjoyed the first three issues of *Collector's Dream* very much, Don Rosa's cover illustration for issue #4 really gripes me, and for a number of reasons, the foremost of these being his obvious unfamiliarity with the topic illustrated.

But first, there are a few things to be made clear before I get down to specifics. I am not, nor have been, a comic book dealer, though I managed a comic shop for the American Comic Book Co. last year. Primarily a "security-salary" job, it served me well until I began to get enough cartooning jobs to live on. I am now a full-time freelance cartoonist, and owe no particular allegiance to any comic dealer, though I still develop special art projects for many of my dealer friends. Second, I have no aversion to the art of Don Rosa, or to Mr. Rosa himself, for that matter. Actually, I enjoy many of his cartoons, and am amazed he can keep track of so much input *and* turn out decent artwork (and where does he find the time to cut all of that damn zip-a-tone?). But, in his cover editorial cartoon, Don airs some of his personal peeves, a few of which I know to be unfounded.

Take a look at the drawing. The saintly dealer on the right displays a sign: "Comics for Enjoyment." I can't argue with those sentiments; in fact, I couldn't agree with 'em more. But I've yet to meet a professional comic book dealer who wasn't doing it to *earn* (or supplement) *a living*, regardless of his love, admiration, etc., for comics. After all, collecting may well be only a hobby, but supplying the collector's demands is a full-time *business*. Don Rosa's drawing indicates that apparently anyone attempting to make a profit as a comic dealer is some kind of subhuman thug. (Again, see Don's illo.)

Then, Mr. Rosa goes on to attack individual dealers in thinly-veiled innuendos and references, sprinkled among the Mafioso-type's wares. His mention of the "Radical Want-List System," "Good Girl Art" and "Esoteric Comics" all not-so-subtly points to an obvious dissatisfaction with the American Comic Book Co., with which these terms are closely associated. Admittedly, the ACBC received a not-so-hot rating in your "Consumer's Guide to Comic Dealers," but that is beside the point. Not only does Don Rosa take near-slanderous potshots at a well-known dealer, but he goes on to imply that the ACBC has initiated a bizarre plot to attach undeserved value to otherwise worthless comics, through its sponsored articles in the Overstreet *Price Guide* for the past three years.

Although this idea should seem ridiculous to anyone familiar with collecting trends, it's apparently necessary to explain *why* such articles are written. As co-author of the "Esoteric Comics" article in the 1977 *Price Guide*, as well as being one of the more visible proponents of this genre of collecting, I feel that the facts surrounding the preparation of such articles be brought to light. The American Comic Book Co. can speak for itself, but in defense of esoteric comics, I feel I have to respond.

As agreed upon with Bob Overstreet, Carl Macek and I compiled information and opinions on what is a rapidly-growing interest among collectors. As a cartoonist and long-time collector, I've been in contact, over the years, with a number of people (both collectors and dealers) who hold in high regard such diverse and oddball comic titles as *Is This Tomorrow?*, *It's Fun to Stay Alive* and *Manuel Pacifico, Tuna Fisherman*. My personal preferences include comics with cover scenes featuring gorillas and/or dinosaurs.

Obviously, these are some of the stranger examples of a collecting philosophy that's becoming increasingly popular: collect what *you* like. In this light, *any* comic book is a potential esoteric comic, depending upon the individual collector's criteria. This trend is, in part, a reaction to the frustration of collecting more widely-sought and over-publicized (and thus, more expensive) comics, such as first issues or those featuring "cult" artists. *Why* Mr. Rosa (and, to be fair, a few others I've encountered) construes this as an attempt on my part to escalate prices is beyond me. In fact, it's amazing that the host of "Information Center," with its incredible diversity of inquiries about all types of comics, isn't aware of these collecting trends. After all, why should I try to increase the demand for such comics as *Negro Romances* or *Scotty MacTape to the Rescue*, when these are the kinds of items I'm looking for for my own collection?

The answer is simple. I and other folks (many more than Don Rosa realizes) *do* value "comics for enjoyment." In fact, my esoteric comics slide show has become a program favorite at conventions, due, in part, to its encouragement of the appreciation of comics on an individual, and more creative, level. The article for the *Price Guide* was written with the same intentions: to examine and report on this phase of collecting, not to jack up the prices of "miscellaneous" comics. No sinister, money-grubbing plot here, regardless of what some might think; just someone attempting to share the facts in an entertaining way.

I hope this letter makes clear my intentions behind the promotion of the concept of esoteric comics. And to Don Rosa, I offer Bob Dylan's advice: "Don't criticize what you can't understand."

Yours,
SCOTT SHAW!
14555 Saticoy Street, #11
Van Nuys, CA 91405

Thanks for your thoughtful letter. Let me reply to a few of your points concerning Don's cover. (Incidentally, the neat zip-a-tone work was done by Ken Steacy, who did a terrific job with just the color green—for money.)

As Don explained his cover in the letter which accompanied it, the characters portrayed represent the two extremes of a continuous range of types of comic dealers: the one on the right (significantly?) being, of course, the saint; and the one on the left (again significantly?) being the ripoff. Most dealers, like the nebulous figure in the center with the question mark, lie in between the two extremes. In point of fact, no specific dealers are identified as either one or the other; and also in point of fact, nowhere does the cartoon imply that making money from dealing in comic books is a sinister thing! Presumably, both *of the indicated dealers make their living by buying and selling comics. What the cartoon illustrates is two extremes of* attitude.

I personally know several dealers whose attitude towards the items they sell and towards their customers is closely approximated by the left-hand figure. They certainly exist. But I don't believe I know any dealers at all *whose attitudes come very close to the one depicted in the right-hand drawing. I believe you are incorrect when you claim that the drawing indicates that "anyone attempting to make a profit as a comic dealer is some kind of thug"; but my experience with dealers is that on the whole they lean rather leftward than rightward. Don Rosa is being generous when he suggests that dealers lie midway between the two poles.*

Don's experience with the ACBC Radi-

Continued on page 14

Illustration © 1978 Nick Poliwko and Tom Nesbitt

Comic collecting is just one of many avocations, and not a particularly prominent one, either.

by George Olshevsky

EDITORIAL

Comic Collecting Is a Small-Time Hobby, Part II

IN THE FIRST HALF of this editorial, published last issue, I examined the various ways in which historical events and corporate interests have combined to keep the overall quality of comics, both in terms of production and content, lamentably low. This, coupled with the notion that "comics are for kids," and therefore worthless, is a major factor in keeping comic book publishing a small-time industry. Anybody who is not convinced that this is the case need only examine what happened this summer to DC Comics, when the conglomerate which owns DC (Warner Communications) axed nearly half their titles without batting a corporate eyelash. If this sort of circumstance is to change, it seems as if it will have to be the comic fans who change it; the corporations are simply not interested, and they certainly do not appear likely to change their payment schedules, marketing techniques and publishing habits to experiment in untried directions. But as shall become apparent as this editorial proceeds, comic fandom is *abysmally* equipped for such an undertaking.

Before going on, let me note that there is a semantic distinction between a comic *fan*—who is a person who enjoys reading comic books in more than a casual way—and a comic *collector*—who is a person who saves them for one reason or another. It so happens that the large majority of comic fans are also comic collectors (and *vice versa*). It is difficult to imagine a comic collector who is not a comic fan, and almost as difficult to imagine a comic fan who isn't at least a bit of a comic collector. Although there are probably persons who are one and not the other, I believe their number is vanishingly small, and in the discussion which follows I will use the two terms interchangably. Thus when I say (as in the title of this editorial) that comic collecting is a small-time hobby, I am directing my indictment toward comic fandom as a whole.

I. COMIC COLLECTING AND OTHER HOBBIES.

Collecting is probably the least demanding of all the kinds of hobbies which exist, barring perhaps television watching (if one cares to call *that* a hobby at all). All that is required of the collector is that he find a source of objects to collect, and proceed to do so. Collecting requires no technical knowledge, such as knowing how to rebuild a carburetor, wire a reversing loop or grind a mirror to ¼-wave tolerance. A collector does not have to be in good physical condition, nor be exceptionally clever or talented. It is a nasty thing to say, but this could in part explain why collecting (not just comic books at this point, but anything) is such a widespread avocation.

The two dominant collecting hobbies are stamp collecting and coin collecting. There are at least twenty times as many of those hobbyists as there are comic collectors. Why should this be so? What is it about stamps and coins which attracts people even more than comic books? Surely, as I have pointed out before, it cannot be that stamps and coins are intrinsically more interesting objects to collect than comic books. How can a little bit of colored paper, or a slug of metal, be even *remotely* as interesting as a vivid comic book?

As hobbies go, stamp and coin collecting have an astonishing amount of influence with such a massive organization as the United States Government. A certain fraction of the resources of both the Postal Service and the Mint are given over to such hobby-oriented considerations as attractive design, issuance of mint and proof sets, first-day cancellations, and so forth. And there are even a few foreign countries (called, naturally enough, "postage-stamp republics") whose primary source of income derives from the sale of philatelic and numismatic items.

Do you think the U. S. Government has *heard* of comic books? "Oh, yeah, comic books. Those are the things that try to get out of paying their second class mailing deposits by changing their titles without renumbering, right?"

Quite a difference in attitude, isn't there?

As I demonstrated last issue, this difference stems from and contributes to a lack of respect for the hobby among the general public. At this point, it may not yet be clear to the reader why the situation should be changed. "Why should I care about whether or not the average public respects the hobby? They can go to the devil. Just give me my comic books and let me be." Again, I refer the reader to the first half of this editorial, published last issue. To refresh the memory: What honestly creative person really wants to work in a medium which is the subject of public derision? "Stan Lee," the most famous pseudonym in the history of comic books, was created because the would-be Famous American Novelist Stanley Lieber did not really want it known that he worked on "funny books." Of course, Stan Lee found his creative niche in comics; but many other good professionals simply don't have the faith in the medium that he had. They leave for other, greener pastures, and everybody who reads and enjoys comics is that much the poorer for it.

I believe that every genuinely creative and talented person should be gainfully employed doing the thing he likes best. For every one who is not, the world is that much worse off for it. I derive much pleasure from reading good comics, and I want those who write and draw them to get their place in the sun. I want them to live well and prosper, because they have made my world that much more interesting. And I know that if those creative and talented people get the recognition they deserve, then they will be that much more likely to continue producing good comic books, and will strive to produce even better ones. Comic fans everywhere can only benefit from such a situation.

Let us therefore examine stamp and coin collecting from the standpoint of public respect, determine whence this respect derives, and see if there are any lessons to be learned for our hobby.

To begin with, stamps and coins are produced by governments. Every stamp which goes into a collection represents pure income for the government, since it never has to deliver the corresponding piece of mail; and a collected coin which the government does not have to redeem represents a similar profit. Governments therefore have a vested interest in promoting the hobbies of stamp and coin collecting, particularly since it is also possible to sell presentation sets, mint sets, proof sets, first-day covers and other specialty items at a distinct premium over their face value. Since governments are by and large respected by the populace, it follows that their works will be respected as well. (It might be significant that my interest in stamp and coin collecting waned with the growing realization that governments are operated by cadres of slimy individuals; but that is another, and longer, story.) It is a most interesting thing that one of the first acts of a new country, for example an "emerging African nation," is the issuing of its own postage

© 1978 George Olshevsky

stamps and coinage as symbols of its particular national identity. And it is no less interesting that the primary subject matter for stamps and coins are political figures and political idealisms.

As political symbols, then, stamps and coins almost by definition receive the best treatment in terms of production. The finest artists and engravers are solicited, the most modern printing and minting technology is used. The horses are not spared when the prestige of the issuing nation is so prominently on display.

And of course, everybody uses the mails and money. The collectibles are always visible and available to anybody.

By contrast, comic books were for much of their history published by little hole-in-the-wall publishers out to make a fast buck. They were lurid and unaesthetic, and dealt with subjects like crime, sordid sex and violence (just take a look at the covers in our Funk Comics article this issue to see what those were like!). They were produced on the cheapest paper using the worst graphic arts techniques conceivable (still true!). And comics are generally shoved into out of the way corners of the average newsstand, if not entirely absent: the average person sees comics only as shredded remnants cluttering up his kids' toy box.

Is it therefore any wonder that stamp and coin collecting are promoted as pleasant diversions, fun for the whole family, while comic collecting remains in the public eye largely as an underground activity engaged in by goofs and oddballs?

It is true that stamps and coins have a longer history and tradition than comic books. The first stamps were issued in 1840; the first coins are almost literally prehistoric. Until the advent of the Industrial Revolution, however, very few people could afford to engage in hobbies at all—there simply was not enough leisure time. Even so, by 1870, a mere thirty years after the first postage stamps, governments were issuing special printings, holding philatelic and numismatic displays at national trade fairs, and in general beginning to cater to the needs of the collector.

Comic books first appeared during the early 1930s, and today, some forty-odd years later, their publishers have begun to exhibit an awareness of comic fandom. Perhaps a hundred or so years from now, comics will have a history and tradition like that of stamp and coin collecting, and an equivalent public image (there must have been a time when stamp and coin collectors were thought of as goofs and oddballs). The questions to be answered are: Are we really willing to wait that long? and Can't the "natural" evolution of the hobby be speeded up a bit, in the light of our historical experience? Computers were invented only two and a half decades ago, but there is already a considerable population of very respected "computer hobbyists" in existence, complete with its own "fan publication" (*Byte* magazine). A long tradition and history is by no means necessary for a hobby to gain public acceptance and respect (but it does help).

Stamp and coin collecting, by contrast with comic collecting, can be termed big-time hobbies. To qualify as "big-time," a hobby must have two things: a central core of theory on which it is based, and a regularly issued periodical publication devoted exclusively to the subject. Both *must* be available to the general public, either in libraries and book stores or on the newsstand, as these are the primary means whereby a prospective participant gains access to the hobby, and the primary means of influx of new ideas. Once these two criteria are met, everything else (and this includes commercial enterprises) will follow. Let me widen the circle of hobbies in this discussion to illustrate how these operate.

Amateur astronomy is a hobby engaged in by a large number of persons around the world. The subject is highly theoretical, having as its base the entire scientific discipline of astronomy. Amateur astronomers are frequently very accomplished craftsmen and observers, capable of building instruments of great precision and making important contributions to the advancement of the science. A person who wishes to become an amateur astronomer can gain a familiarity with the subject by reading the newsstand publication *Sky and Telescope*, and there is sufficient material available for him to advance right to the frontiers of the science, if he cares to. And a thriving commercial business exists in the manufacture and sale of telescopes and telescope parts.

Now consider a more mundane hobby like model railroading. Again, there is a central core of theory, in this case comprised of some electronics, some sculpture (particularly of miniatures), some history (of railroading operations in large measure); and there are several newsstand publications (*Model Railroader*, *Railroad Model Craftsman*, *Trains* to name three) exclusively devoted to the hobby. The role of the periodicals is to disseminate information about new developments, to display models built by hobbyists, to advertise the manufacturers of model kits and tools, and to provide a forum for the interchange of ideas and opinions about model railroading.

Every game hobby, such as chess or bridge, has a deep theoretical core. In chess there is the vast literature of opening theory, middle game theory, end game theory and records of Master and Grandmaster play with analyses. Again, several periodicals (some *weekly*!) are available on the newsstand which carry the latest chess developments, chess problems and tournament news.

One might argue that each of the above pastimes requires a certain level of technical skill and talent, and that a hobby like comic collecting simply does not need such a formidable amount of background. Not so. The theoretical literature for stamp collecting, the most closely related big-time hobby to comic collecting, consists of highly technical accounts of printing methods, detailed histories of postal operations, ways to positively identify suspected forgeries, ways to distinguish varieties of stamps by differences in paper, dies, watermarks, and much more. Again, there are several newsstand publications which can lead the lay person into the hobby.

Now let us examine comic collecting. I can envision a wide theoretical literature which could serve as the core of comic collecting. It would include things such as comic indexes (which now exist in some abundance among the hobbyists, but are entirely unavailable at the public library or the local book store), biographies of professionals (Jerry Bails' *Who's Who* and Maurice Horn's encyclopedia come to mind here), a real set of critical criteria allowing the knowledgable and interested layman to formulate judgments as to the worth of a particular piece of comic story or art (none exists to my knowledge), accounts of how comic books are printed (very hard to find, and usually quite shallow), and others. But it happens that virtually all the literature *about* comic books consists of picture books, collections of comic strip reprints, and nostalgic or opinionated writing without solid foundation. There is in fact only one publication which embodies what could be called the core of comic collecting theory and which is available in a general way to the public: the *Comic Book Price Guide*. That's something to think about, isn't it?

One might think, since comics themselves are newsstand publications, that one might be able to learn about the hobby in some manner from the very items one wishes to collect. Not necessarily. As this magazine showed last issue, the prospective comic fan is met from that direction by a phalanx of comic book dealers, who will sell him three comics for nearly eight bucks and throw in bad grammar

in their price lists.

There are several periodicals which in one way or another "serve comic fandom." The five most prominent are *The Comic Reader*, *Rocket's Blast/Comicollector*, *The Comics Journal*, *The Buyer's Guide For Comic Fandom* and *Collector's Dream*. None is available on the newsstands to the general public. Why not? Because no publisher is willing to front the money to initiate newsstand distribution, a qualified production staff cannot be assembled and kept together for any length of time, and there is nobody willing to try to develop the market for such a publication. Deep down inside, comic fans remain small-time thinkers despite all the verbiage and the big-time prices being paid for some comic books and original art.

Comic collecting can be seen to lack both hallmarks whose presence distinguishes the big-time hobby from the small-time hobby. There is essentially no theoretical core proclaiming the hobby as one with real depth and interest, and there is no freely available newsstand publication to stimulate the exchange of information. I believe that this situation will eventually change (or the hobby will wither away), and it is just possible that my activities as an editor and publisher will contribute to the change. But comic collecting will come of age only after comic fans everywhere come together in a concerted, organized effort to elevate the hobby. This in turn will require a revolution in fannish thinking, in fannish attitudes toward various aspects of their hobby and in the types of things which presently take up space in fannish publications. Let me now review some of those things.

II. REBUILDING THE COMIC FAN.

Millions of people in North America read and purchase comic books with some regularity, and therefore qualify as comic fans. (Comics are a world-wide phenomenon; see for example the article on Filipino comics in this issue. The North American comic community is peculiarly isolated from the rest of the world, but it is from that readership that comic fandom as we know it is derived.) Of these, only a small fraction—less than 10%—are what could be considered "seriously interested" in the comics they read. The vast majority of comic book readers are kids, casually interested adults, functional illiterates (yes: many people do not advance in their reading level beyond comic books as they now exist) and others who would not notice a newsstand magazine devoted to comic collecting or, if they did, would not bother to buy it.

This still leaves almost 100,000 people. Of these again less than 10% are reached by the five fan publications enumerated above. The others for some reason or other have not yet discovered comic fandom, or if they have, do not read the fan press with any regularity or interest. Fewer than 10,000 copies of any of those magazines are actually sold, either by subscription or through comic book specialty stores, and they are probably sold to the same group of about 10,000 fans—who thus constitute active fandom as it now exists.

This number is too small. Given the usual 1% ratio of creative, energetic people to drones, this means that barely a hundred highly motivated and capable individuals determine the opinions, attitudes and critical base of fandom. The danger is too great that the thinking of these individuals—the publishers, researchers and contributors to fan publications—will become creased and inbred, and ultimately infertile and formula-bound. In short, the possibility is strong that comic fandom will stagnate. (Think about it: don't you see the same people popping up over and over again in letter columns, as writers of articles, as artists? Truly, comic fandom needs an infusion of new blood from the outside world.)

At this stage it is useful to compare comic fandom to that other famous fan group, science fiction fandom. Science fiction fandom is scarcely a decade or so older than comic fandom: the first science fiction magazines appeared only a few years before the first comic books. But how much more they have accomplished! They have almost single-handedly brought into public acceptance a literary genre which was once as deeply buried as comic literature is now. There are currently almost a dozen slick newsstand periodicals devoted to science fiction and related futuristic topics. And there exists a profound literature of science fiction criticism—not to mention the entire range of the sciences—which serves as the theoretical base for the hobby. (In fact, calling science fiction fandom a "hobby" now seems singularly inappropriate!) There is scarcely a university in the country which does not offer a course in science fiction on its literary calendar.

In my opinion, there is every reason to expect and desire comic fandom to reach that level of sophistication and interest. Comic books are potentially the most interesting of all literary forms, being a synthesis of both story and art to a degree unapproached anywhere else. The sad fact that comic books remain in the basement (in North America at any rate) is partly attributable to the professionals—as explained in detail last issue—but it is *mainly* attributable to the appalling inertia exhibited within comic fandom. The professionals are competent people responding to what they see as sound trends. Their attitude, in a nutshell, might be summarized as "if they want to read junk, and especially if they buy junk, then we see no particularly good reason to create anything else."

I see comic fans in general as passive rather than active in the pursuit of their hobby, adopting the role of consumer (reader) rather than creator (writer). They love to criticize the work of the professionals (in scores of "review columns"), but almost never demonstrate equivalent talent or commitment. Further, lacking a central theory of comic book criticism, their critiques can only be vacant and baseless. In those rare instances when they do produce creative works of their own, they are hypersensitive to the criticism of others: the fragile "fan ego" is one of the deepest roots of fandom's problem, since it inhibits creative fan participation in the hobby. Fans bruise too easily and seem incapable of defending their work to others; if their work is to be accepted and viewed on a wider stage, then they will just have to learn what *real* criticism is. They will have to take their creative efforts out of the sheltered environments of APAs and fanzines into the cold, hard world outside, wrestle with it and emerge victorious. Only then will comic fandom be taken seriously as a proper forum for human discourse.

So: what we need is to have fans and collectors come out of the closet and *write*. There are many persons who have an excellent grasp of the theory of comic book storytelling and art; their knowledge should be written down, published and distributed to the world at large. There are persons who have researched back issue comics with thoroughness and diligence; their results should be published and made available to collectors. There are persons demonstrably capable of writing and drawing excellent comic books; they should be encouraged and given the opportunity to see their work in print. And most importantly: markets must be developed for this material on a much larger scale than ever before, to pay for this burgeoning creative effort. It will almost certainly happen in a hundred years; I want to see it happen in *ten*. □

George Olshevsky Jr.

Mail *continued from page 9*

cal Want List System" was exactly as suggested in the cartoon. He sent in his want list and the fee, and got no results, even after several further follow-up "Are you people there?" letters. Only after he threatened them with a writeup in his column did they even send him a reply. I do not know whether he ever received the advertised "complete search through our entire stock to fill out your want list" from them. Until now, however, this experience was not known to the general public; the inscription on the cartoon can easily be taken on its own terms. I fail to see any slander at all in his treatment (else I would not have run it). It is possible that you, being closer to the operation, might feel that it strikes a bit close to home.

In the past, I have found ACBC's service to be absolutely superlative. They supplied me with several dozen of my most wanted Timelys when I was collecting them, in excellent condition and for a reasonable price. However, recent purchases of my own and my friends' over the past two years, and reader responses to our survey with detailed complaints, have caused me to revise my rating downwards. Our survey indeed reflects this—not because we were influenced by our dealings and by Don's experience, but because the material we received and the service we encountered through conducting the survey was as described. Our survey was completely *unbiased in any way.*

I sincerely hope that the effect of the survey and this correspondence will be to bring their service back to its former status.

It is extremely common for dealers to respond to articles appearing in the Price Guide *in just the fashion satirized on the cover; namely, by jacking up their prices. It is disturbingly common for collectors to respond in kind by* paying *those prices. It is almost a standing joke that people unwilling to pay 50¢ for 1950s love comics can now purchase these same items for $5.00 an issue or even more. It is possible that collectors' interests are sparked by* Price Guide *articles; I believe it is more likely their belief that the prices will go even higher (as a result of the article!) causes them to make such purchases. In any case, the cartoon does not indicate that the ACBC or any other comic dealer is engaged in any kind of plot to raise prices by getting articles published in the* Price Guide, *and I think it is peculiar that you would get this impression.*

It's interesting that you mention as a philosophy "that's becoming increasingly popular: collect what you *like." I've always collected exactly and only what I like, not what somebody else tells me I should like, and I've always assumed that this was the guiding philosophy behind everybody's collecting. You are surely at least partly correct in stating that the collection of so-called "esoteric comics" is in part "a reaction to the frustration of collecting more widely-sought and over-publicized...comics"; but I'm baffled by why you think Don's cartoon indicates that you are the* instigator *of the price rise. You are in fact a reporter of trends. All of comic fandom applauds your effort to share your interest in comics with us and to point out why the books you're collecting are fun to read and own. Many fans have had their eyes opened as the direct result of your writing and slide show—I know I have. But it is exactly the kind of dealer depicted in the cartoon who would try hardest to capitalize on this new-found fannish trend. Hence it is singularly appropriate and not at all out of place to find the kinds of signs and notices on his premises as are illustrated. It is clearly not your plot; it is the money-grubbing dealer's plot which is exemplified and pointed at in the cartoon.*

—G.O.

DEALER SURVEY RESPONSE

Tony, George and crew,

We have just received our copy of CD #4. Our congratulations on your survey. I am sure a lot of time and effort were invested in this project, and the end result was certainly proof of that. A job well done.

In response to our review (if we may): At the time of your survey our business was going through the most drastic change we have yet encountered (but who cares?).

We felt we have made a few positive changes since then (boy have we tried). First of all, our latest catalogue #17 is on its way to you. It will arrive unsealed in a manila envelope, as that's the only way the Postal Service will allow us to send it. In regard to your "order." Our promise of insurance is valid. All packages which leave here are insured by us personally. If your package is lost, we will make good on it.

Again, our thanks for an outstanding job and for giving us a minute of your time.

PASSAIC BOOK CENTER
594 Main Avenue
Passaic, NJ 07055

You might be interested to know that we are planning another dealer survey for 1979, which will encompass an even wider set of dealers than the last. We received far too many letters from collectors to be able to print anything like a representative fraction, and many of them detailed specific instances of bad service from the surveyed dealers. It is possible that someday we will publish a book with just the reader responses, but given our workload that's not likely. We did have to print up a second printing of the issue (we sold 6500 copies altogether), and we think we can attribute this directly to the existence of the dealer survey. And we hope that all the surveyed dealers take the survey in a positive sense, as a guide to improving their service, rather as some kind of attempt to discredit and malign them. If just one dealer looks at his listing and says, "Our packaging is no good; I'll go out and get better mailing bags tomorrow," and so forth, then we feel that we have done our job.

Just the sort of response we like to hear appears below. Unfortunately, we had to abridge the letter somewhat, but its essence is quite clear.

MOONDANCE MESSAGE

Dear George and Tony,

I am truly grateful to you both, and to Ron Gomes, for the wonderful article on dealers which appeared in #4. This was one of the finest services that anyone could lend comic fandom. I feel the article was fair and to the best of my knowledge extremely accurate. I was pleased to note how Moondance stacked up against my friendly competitors, and was gratified to note that we are at least in the ballpark and probably doing as good a job if not better than most.

I was disturbed to note the problems you had obtaining our catalog. I'm sure the border crossing must have had something to do with it. You'll be pleased to note that as of the beginning of 1978 all catalogs are mailed 1st class. This costs us almost four times as much, but we feel we are serving fandom better by this quicker service. Canadian and foreign orders cost us a great deal more in terms of money, time and aggravation because of the border crossing. Frankly, I was surprised that you received your selection of comics by 4th class mail. It should have been sent 3rd class, and was a mistake of my friendly neighborhood Post Office.

My customers and your readers will also be pleased to learn that within the next month Moondance will be changing two of its policies. First, we will ship all comic orders in four-sided cardboard containers especially made to hold and protect comics. (Comics will still be individually bagged, as usual.) Secondly, our new order form will have space for a Province and Postal Code as well as for a State and Zip Code.

Since the time your article was researched, our sales have tripled. We must be doing something right!

ALAN B. GOLDSTEIN
Moondance Productions Inc.
Box 425
Wilmington, VT 05363

Amen, brother. Your letter speaks for itself; and we've run out of room!

ORACLE

Report to the Priesthood

By Bennet Marks

[The following article was constructed from a document circulated among members of the Kree religious sect known as the Priests of Pama. As such, it by and large faithfully reproduces the original text of the report. However, the Priesthood has its own arcane sources and intelligence-gathering agencies to which we, as ordinary editors of a popular magazine, are not privy. We cannot vouch for the accuracy of certain statements made herein, because we lack the expertise and manpower necessary to perform independent verification. Nevertheless, certain events described in the report have been made public in Marvel comics, and we have inserted footnotes to the appropriate issues wherever we felt it was useful. All the footnotes are our own editorial additions to the text, and should not be regarded as part of the original document.]

Report 7 from Research Group 15942-5

For the Archives of the Priests of Pama on Earth

Heading: Genealogical Information

May it enlighten the Priesthood

Introduction

Research Group 15942-5 has been engaged in investigating and documenting the family history of the Celestial Madonna. During the course of this research we have discovered a number of wholly unexpected genealogical links among a variety of extraordinary individuals, many of whom are included in the vaguely-defined group known as the "superheroes." Although much of this information pertains only peripher-

©1978 Bennet Marks

Illustrations by Ken Steacy

ally to our primary subject, we feel it may be of significance to the Priesthood for two reasons: (1) General knowledge, and (2) the information indicates with high probability the activities of some entity or group of entities which is manipulating society for its own purposes.

The tentative results of our investigation are summarized in the following biographical information, organized by family, and the genealogical chart (figure 1). NOTE: Not all parents or offspring are referenced.

McKenzie

Stephen McKenzie (b. 1866) was a schoolteacher and administrator in Boston, Massachusetts. He had two sons, Francis (b. 1891) and Leonard (b. 1896). Francis studied anthropology and medicine at Brown University and began a promising career on the faculty at Harvard. He married Jane Arliss (b. 1893); they had one child, a son, Benjamin (b. 1916).

Leonard became a ship's captain and an adventurer, to the embarrassment of his more status-conscious brother. On a scientific expedition to the Antarctic in 1921, Leonard captured Princess Fen of Atlantis,[1] who had been sent to investigate the presence of his vessel, a schooner named the *Oracle*, near Atlantean waters. A short time later Leonard and Fen were married by the ship's chaplain, much to the shock of the crew, many of whom believed Fen to be a supernatural and sinister being.

Only a few days after the wedding the ship was attacked by Atlantean soldiers searching for their Emperor's missing daughter. Against her will Fen was "rescued" and taken back to her home.[2] Leonard was injured and many of his crewmen killed during the battle, forcing him to return to land immediately without his bride.

At this time there were no official surface records of human-Atlantean contact, and Leonard's story of an undersea kingdom was not believed. After a second McKenzie expedition proved futile and disastrous, Leonard suffered a complete mental breakdown and vanished from sight for many years.[3] Fen and Leonard's son, the now-famous Prince Namor, was born in Atlantis in 1922 [*Ed. Note: On Feb. 2.*[4]].

Francis grew concerned over the possibility that the social scandal surrounding his brother's difficulties might interfere with his professional aspirations. After Harvard refused him tenure in late 1921, he resolved to leave Massachusetts to build a new life elsewhere. His wife Jane refused to accompany him, and on this note their already-strained marriage shattered. After the divorce Jane resumed her maiden name of Arliss, and their son took that name as his. Benjamin later married and had two children, Todd (b. 1936) and Diane (b. 1948). Todd Arliss is the supervillain known as Tiger Shark.[5]

Francis McKenzie changed his name to Emil Frank and moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he started a medical practice under his assumed name and also joined the faculty at the University of Pennsylvania. There he met and later married his second wife, Helga Blazer, a divorced German-born woman who had come to the United States in 1919 shortly before the birth of her son Bertolt. Emil and Helga had two children, Robert (b. 1922) and Yvette (b. 1925).

Robert Frank became a superhero, the Whizzer,[6] and was active in the Liberty Legion of World War II and the All Winner's Squad of the post-war period. After the break-up of the Squad in 1947, he married fellow member Madeline Joyce (Miss America), and they retired from the public scene to raise a family. Their first child (b. 1949) was a terribly deformed and destructive mutant, known only as "Nuklo," whom the American government has maintained in suspended animation almost continuously since birth.

The record of what happened to Robert and Madeline Frank after their mutant son "Nuklo" was born is not clear. Madeline became pregnant a second time and she and Robert left the United States to escape the terrifying memory of their first child. Traveling in the Swiss countryside in 1950, they chanced upon Wundagore, the research center of the High Evolutionary. There Madeline gave birth to twins, Pietro and Wanda, who were later known as Quicksilver and the Scarlet

©1978 Marvel Comics Group

Witch.[7]

Research into this event shows several puzzling aspects: (1) Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch, identified as members of the Avengers and, earlier, Magneto's Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, are demonstrably too old to be the children of Robert and Madeline Frank born in 1950. (2) Our inquiries disclose that, at the time the Franks were visiting Switzerland, two children, both approximately seven years old, were living at Wundagore and attending school in the near-by town of Tannurlich. These children were also named Pietro and Wanda.

Deeper investigation into these seeming paradoxes suggests the following tentative explanation: In 1950 a European branch of the cult of the demi-goddess Umar was centered not far from Wundagore. The leader of the cult, a woman with some clairvoyant abilities, had a vision foretelling the birth of a female of a great supernatural power. She repeated this premonition to Umar, who instructed her to invade Wundagore and abduct the infant so that she might be raised under the control of the cult and become its high priestess. When Wundagore's New-Men, aided by Robert Frank, defeated the attacking cultists, Umar herself crossed the dimensional barrier to Earth in order to obtain the infant for her purposes. She almost succeeded; certainly neither Robert Frank nor the then-still-human High Evolutionary had the power to stop her. But, as previously mentioned, a seven-year-old girl named Wanda was at this time living at Wundagore. She became involved in the battle, and a hex cast by her, combining synergistically with the (presumably accidental) first hex cast by the new-born Wanda Frank, produced a local time disturbance so powerful that Umar was hurled several years into the future. The psychic feedback from this spell also threw the new-born twins seven years into the past, where they were received in 1943 by the High Evolutionary and raised in Wundagore.

This chain of events helps to explain: (1) the fact that the children of Robert and Madeline Frank are older than might be expected, (2) the apparent paradox of the two sets of twins, and (3) the absence of Umar and the decline of her followings in the early 1950's. But several other aspects of this unusual and significant affair remain a mystery to us. Madeline Frank died during or immediately after the battle at Wundagore—most probably because she did not receive necessary medical attention, but it is also possible that she was more directly involved in the battle. Robert Frank was emotionally unable to cope with both the death of his wife and the seeming transformation of his new-born children into seven-year-old strangers; he fled Wundagore and, upon his return to the United States, entered a state of deep depression which lasted many years. He has largely repressed the entire episode, and presently remembers very little of the circumstances surrounding his wife's death. Shortly after his departure Pietro and Wanda were adopted (with the High Evolutionary's encouragement) by a family living in Tannurlich, and they never returned to Wundagore. Their memories of Wundagore were artificially clouded by devices of the High Evolutionary so that they would not inadvertently reveal the nature of his work to the local populace, and to this day their knowledge of their childhood years is limited. Few members of the Alpine cult of Umar have survived,[8] and the High Evolutionary and his New-Men have left Earth. Our investigations in this area are continuing at a slow pace.[9]

In 1963 Wanda's powers were accidentally revealed to the townspeople who, thinking her a witch, attempted to kill her. She and her brother Pietro were rescued by Magneto, who pressed them into joining his Brotherhood of Evil Mutants.[10] After breaking with him they joined the Avengers.[11] Pietro Frank has since married Crystal of the Royal Family of Attilan and moved to the Great Refuge.[12] Wanda Frank is married to the Vision, an android member of the Avengers,[13] no offspring are ex-

pected from that union.

Yvette Frank married Arthur Douglas, a real estate agent; they had one child, a daughter, Heather (b. 1950). Yvette and Arthur were killed in 1953 by Thanos of the Titanian pantheon, [14] but Heather was rescued by Thanos' father Mentor and raised in the Shao-Lom monastery, where she was trained in many of the Paman disciplines by our brother priests and considered for the role of the Celestial Madonna. She is also called Moondragon, and has been associated with the Avengers.[15]

To return to the ultimate fate of Emil Frank, his medical practice was abruptly terminated by a gang of criminals in 1939. He and Robert fled a trumped-up murder charge to Africa, leaving behind his wife Helga and his daughter Yvette. Emil became obsessed with the desire for vengeance against those who had forced him to flee. Unfortunately, though, not long after their arrival in Africa, Robert was bitten by one of the many venomous snakes known to inhabit that continent and lay at death's door. Using his medical skills, Emil Frank was able to save his son's life by injecting him with a mongoose serum extract, which peculiarly enough also gave Robert the ability to move with blinding speed. In a flash, Emil realized that his son's new-found powers could be used to fulfil his vow of vengeance; but the excitement, coupled with the stresses of his tribulations, caused a cardiac arrest. Emil Frank died, and as noted above, Robert Frank became the Whizzer.[16]

The death of his sister Yvette was another factor contributing to Robert Frank's continued mental illness. It is interesting to note that his breakdown followed the same behaviorial pattern as that of his uncle Leonard McKenzie after the loss of his wife Fen—probably an inherited pattern tending toward depression and paranoia, which has also been observed in Robert's son Pietro, albeit in a more circumscribed fashion.

Leonard McKenzie was briefly united with his son Namor in 1971, shortly before Leonard's death.[17]

Taresh of Atlantis used the name John *MacKenzie* during his stay on land, but neither he nor his descendents are properly members of the *McKenzie* family discussed here, except by marriage.

The Royal Family of Atlantis

Tha-Ronn (b. 1782) was emperor of Atlantis from 1822 until his death in 1887. He had two sons by his wife Tarlenara, Tha-Korr (b. 1820) and Jekkoro (b. 1831). Jekkoro had one son, Jyrran (b. 1881), whose son is Prince Byrrah (b. 1917). In 1858, Tha-Ronn made Tarlenara Empress of Atlantis as a sign of his devotion. Tarlenara ruled alone just three more years, until 1890.

Tha-Korr became emperor after his mother died. He had two children, a son, Taresh (b. 1873), and a daughter, Fen (b. 1890). Fen married a human, Capt. Leonard McKenzie. Their son, Prince Namor, has been active in several superhero groups, including the Invaders of World War II, the All Winner's Squad, and the Defenders. Namor was married to Dorma of Atlantis, but she was killed on their wedding day.[18]

Jyrran died shortly after Byrrah's birth, and Tha-Korr took Byrrah's mother to wife; this made Byrrah the Emperor's stepson and gave him firmer ground for a claim to the throne in later years.

Taresh, heir apparent to his father's throne, was a man of great strength, spirit and intelligence; a brilliant scientist, he invented (in 1919) the first Atlan-

tean "air-breathing" pills, which Fen later used while investigating McKenzie's ship. In 1921 Taresh left Atlantis for the surface world in search of the man who, he believed, had seduced and abandoned his sister. Disguised with body make-up as a human, he took the name John MacKenzie (accidentally misspelling the famous name) and claimed to be Leonard's cousin. The trail led as far as Jane Arliss (formerly McKenzie), Leonard's sister-in-law, but ended there; both Leonard and his brother Francis had already vanished—Leonard a victim of mental collapse, Francis of fear of social scandal.

Living at this time with Jane and her son Benjamin were Jane's sister, Valerie Arliss Bentley, and Valerie's daughter Mary. Until recently, Valerie had been living in England with her husband, Walter Bentley, and their three children, Clive, Mary, and Katherine. Walter and Katherine disappeared under bizarre circumstances in 1918 and were presumed dead. After that tragedy, Valerie returned with Mary to her Bostonian home and took up residence with Jane. Clive remained in school in England, eventually taking up residence in their ancestral home, Castle Bentley.

Jane was of course aware that no "John MacKenzie" existed, and Taresh revealed his origins to her and Valerie. While his search continued, he and Valerie fell in love and, in 1922, were married. They had three children, John Paul (b. 1923), Oliver Hazard (b. 1924), and Alyson (b. 1928). Valerie died from complications three months after Alyson's birth. Taresh, no longer feeling bound to the surface world, left for Atlantis with his infant daughter. His two sons, however, were already acclimated to life on the surface; they remained behind in the care of their aunt Jane, as did Taresh's step-daughter Mary.

Taresh was a changed man after his return home. He refused to divulge the circumstances surrounding his seven-year absence, and chose to live outside the city with only a few servants and a tutor for his daughter, who later named herself Namora after her cousin Namor (for obvious reasons she hated her Atlantean name "Aquaria Nautica Neptunia"). After her father's untimely death in 1937,[19] Namora was brought into Atlantis to live with the rest of the Royal Family. During the Atlantean exodus of 1955, Namora traveled to Lemuria, where she was received as a guest of Naga, the Lemurian Emperor. There she met Merro, the Emperor's great-grandnephew and heir presumptive. Namora and Merro never married, due to objections from the Lemurian Royal Council, but they did have a child, a daughter, Namorita (b. 1956).[20]

Naga was the first owner of the Serpent Crown of Lemuria, a supernatural device for amplifying the psychic abilities and lifespan of the wearer. The Crown had been stolen from him many years before, but its effects continued undiminished for some time; it was not until the early 1960's that he began to age and lose his powers. In 1967 Merro led an unsuccessful rebellion against Naga, who by that time was almost completely insane. Both Merro and Namora were arrested on charges of treason, and a public announcement was made that they had been executed and the rebellion had been crushed. In reality, Naga had them imprisoned in the Imperial dungeons—perhaps out of some sentimental im-

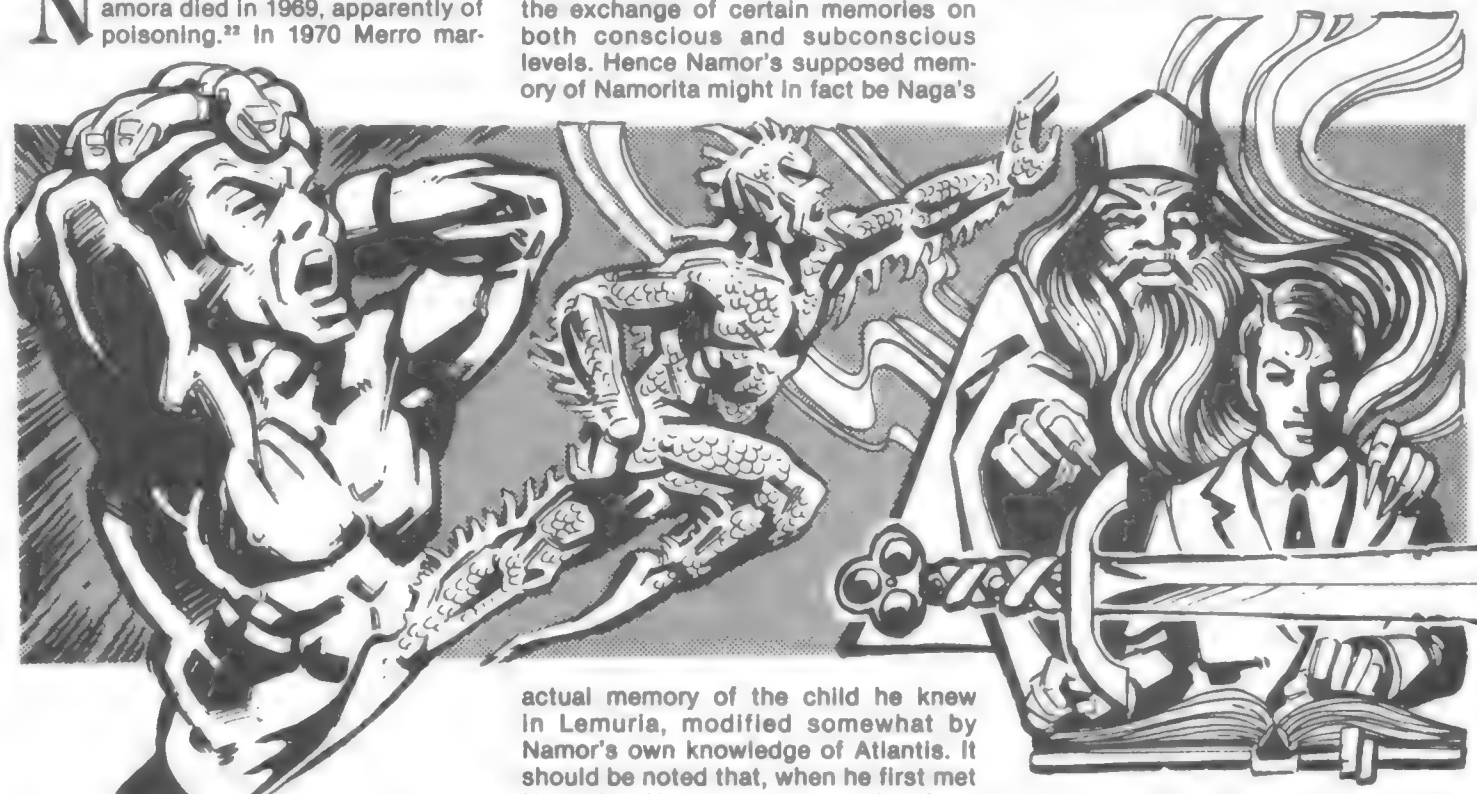
© 1978 Marvel Comics Group

pulse, or perhaps with the intent to torture them at his leisure. Namorita might also have been arrested, despite her age, but some of Merro's remaining co-conspirators managed to get her out of Lemuria to a secret base, where she stayed for the remainder of Naga's reign.

In November of 1968 Naga was deposed by Karthon, one of his own Questers (a semireligious order of the Imperial guard organized by Naga and charged with finding the missing Serpent Crown), who was aided by Namor himself.[21] Several days later, and after Namor's departure, Merro and Namora (among other prisoners) were located in the dungeons and released. They joined with Karthon in leading the rebuilding of the city, and Merro made no attempt to press his claim on the throne.

Namora died in 1969, apparently of poisoning.[22] In 1970 Merro married Llyra, the daughter of human scientist Rhonda Morris and Lemurian nobleman Llyron.[23] After Merro's death that same year, Llyra, with the help of the Royal Council, overthrew Karthon and became sole ruler of Lemuria. Namorita believes that Llyra poisoned Namora, but it is more likely that she was killed by Lemurian nobility who were plotting to re-establish the monarchy and preferred a half-Lemurian empress to the possibility of a half-Atlantean one; we are still investigating the details of this occurrence. However, it is almost certain that Llyra killed her husband Merro. Namorita also claims that her father was an Atlantean married to her mother who died during the 1955 exodus—a story circulated in Lemuria for propriety's sake after Namorita birth. Since Namorita was rather young when her mother died, it is possible that she was never told the truth, and still believes in this fictional Atlantean father.

According to our Atlantean sources, Namor, upon meeting Namorita for the first time in 1972, claimed to have a dim memory of her birth and infancy—in Atlantis![24] One possible explanation of this unusual fact is the following: In 1968 Namor briefly donned the Serpent Crown and, according to his own statements was flooded with images of the splitting and dual migrations of his undersea race at some time in the distant past.[25] These images correspond with several Lemurian myths. We suggest that his contact with the Crown created an intense, momentary telepathic link between Namor and Naga, the Crown's primary user, resulting in the exchange of certain memories on both conscious and subconscious levels. Hence Namor's supposed memory of Namorita might in fact be Naga's actual memory of the child he knew in Lemuria, modified somewhat by Namor's own knowledge of Atlantis. It should be noted that, when he first met Namorita, Namor was recovering from amnesia (a condition from which he has suffered several times). Consequently it is not entirely unreasonable to believe that he might have had difficulty distinguishing between false and authentic memories. This theory may be confirmed at some later time if Namor exhibits additional anomalous memories; meanwhile we are exploring various other possibilities.



John Paul MacKenzie became a criminal and joined the crime cartel Zodiac under the name of Pisces. Oliver Hazard MacKenzie resolved to live as normal a human life as possible, and has so far succeeded. He is married and has three children, Daniel (b. 1941), a Roman Catholic priest, Sharon (b. 1943), a librarian, and Steven (b. 1957), currently a college student. Sharon is married to Laurence Foster, an actor, and has two children, twin boys, Caswell and Paul (b. 1971).

Observations reveal that all the descendants of Taresh and Valerie MacKenzie (including Caswell and Paul Foster, who are seven-eighths human, and only one-eighth Atlantean) share with Namor the "hybrid characteristics" most commonly found in the offspring of mixed marriages between Atlantean royalty and humans: amphibian breathing ability, great strength, and functional ankle-wings. This and other evidence have led to the postulation that these characteristics may have a stability factor of five generations or more.

Both Benjamin Arliss and Mary Bentley were aware of the unusual heritage and characteristics of John Paul MacKenzie and Oliver Hazard MacKenzie, with whom they were brought up. But it is believed that neither Benjamin nor Mary ever revealed these family secrets to anyone, including their own spouses and children. Benjamin's fascination with water and the sea, no doubt influenced by his association with John Paul and Oliver Hazard, later found expression in the training he gave to his son Todd, who won three gold medals and one silver in the 1960 Olympic swimming competitions.

Bentley

Walter Bentley (b. 1876) was an English student of the occult and a minor sorcerer. While doing research in Arkham, Massachusetts, in

1907, he met and married Valerie Arliss (b. 1885), and returned with her to his castle near London shortly thereafter. They had three children, Clive (b. 1908), Mary (b. 1912), and Katherine (b. 1918).

Walter was especially fascinated by the body of lore surrounding Modred, the sorcerous illegitimate son of King Arthur. He became obsessed with the possibility of raising Modred's spirit from the dead; this obsession hastened the deterioration of his already unstable personality. In 1918 Walter's supernatural investigations and experiments yielded an astonishing discovery: by sacrificing his youngest child in an elaborately proscribed ritual, he could obtain Modred's full power—in effect, become an incarnation of Modred. With this in mind, he surreptitiously left his home with his infant daughter Katherine.

The ritual involved the use of an ancient artifact known as the Ebony Blade. This weapon had been created by the wizard Merlin for the Black Knight of Camelot, who was one of Modred's opponents during King Arthur's reign.[28] Walter stole the Ebony Blade from the estate of Quentin Garrett, a direct descendent of the Black Knight. However, he was tracked down and stopped by Jerard Garrett (Quentin's brother), Theodore Garrett (Quentin's son), and Lord Falsworth, a colleague of theirs. During the conflict, Walter was killed and his body burned beyond recognition by an elemental fire-demon which he conjured up to defeat his enemies but found he could not control. Neither he nor the infant Katherine, who was unhurt, were ever identified.

Katherine Bentley was subsequently adopted by Quentin Garrett's sister Deborah and her husband Charles Joyce, a distant relative of the famous Irish novelist James Joyce. The Joyces named her Madeline. Charles later became a world-famous and very wealthy traveler and journalist who found it necessary to be absent from home for long periods of time. Therefore Katherine was generally in the company of Charles' friend James Bennet, a radio tycoon.

On a trip to an experimental power station, Madeline was accidentally exposed to an overdose of electricity, which endowed her with the ability to fly and with super-strength. The scientist manning the station,. Professor Lawson, attempted suicide in remorse over what he thought was the death of his mentor's ward.[27] He succeeded in destroying the station, but failed to destroy himself, because he later (in 1967) acquired employment as an expert in guidance systems at the Cape Canaveral Space Flight Center in Florida. His identity was briefly assumed by a Kree officer, Mar-Vell, at the outset of his operations on earth.[28]

Madeline Joyce thus became the superhero Miss America, active in the Liberty Legion and the All Winner's Squad. After the Squad disbanded, she married fellow member Robert Frank and had three children: a deformed mutant called "Nuklo," and the twins Wanda and Pietro.[29]

Shortly after the disappearance of Walter and Katherine, Valerie Bentley discovered her husband's notes, the contents of which convinced her that she would never see her husband or daughter alive again; consequently she was unsurprised that the police could find no indication of their whereabouts. In 1919, Valerie moved back to the United States with her daughter Mary. Clive Bentley remained at school in England; he later married and had one child, Victoria Bentley (b. 1938), a little-known psychic of some potential.[30] Clive was knighted in 1953 for his contributions to neurosurgery.

Valerie was remarried to Taresh of Atlantis. After she died and Taresh returned to Atlantis, Mary Bentley was left in the care of her aunt, Jane Arliss. Mary later married Franklin Storm. They had two children, Susan (b. 1940) and John (b. 1947).[31] Susan is known as the Invisible Girl, a member of the Fantastic Four, and John is the Human Torch of that same group. Susan Storm married Reed Richards, also known as Mr. Fantastic, the leader of the Fantastic Four. They have one child, Franklin Benjamin Richards (b. 1968).[32]

Garrett

© 1978 Marvel Comics Group

Sir Percy of Scandia (b. 803) was the original Black Knight of Camelot.[33] A British poet and nobleman, Percy was called upon by the wizard Merlin to help protect King Arthur's realm against natural and supernatural enemies; he hid his true identity behind the disguise of the Black Knight against the possibility of reprisals. To compensate for

Percy's complete inaptitude for magic, Merlin forged for him the Ebony Blade, an enchanted sword made from the core of a meteor.

One of the Black Knight's most determined opponents was Modred, Arthur's illegitimate son, a powerful sorcerer and influential member of the Royal Court. Modred rarely involved himself directly in physical combat, but many of the Black Knight's battles were waged against his agents. In 833 Modred discovered the Knight's true identity and killed him, a key event in the fall of Camelot. Modred himself died shortly thereafter, but his mystical abilities have enabled his personality to incarnate itself during various eras, so that his influence continues to the present day. Anticipating this eventuality, Merlin cast a spell over the dying Sir Percy, empowering the Black Knight's ghost to appear before his descendants and enlist their aid in the centuries-long battle against Modred's will.[34]

Thomas Garrett (b. 1832), a British lawyer and land-owner, was a direct descendent of Sir Percy of Scandia. He had three children: Quentin (b. 1871), Deborah (b. 1880), and Jerard (b. 1887). In 1911 Quentin fought as the Black Knight against a man possessed by the spirit of Modred. Modred was defeated, but during the battle Quentin received severe injuries, resulting in the loss of his right arm and eye. Embittered by the experience, he withdrew from public life and retired to the family's country estate.

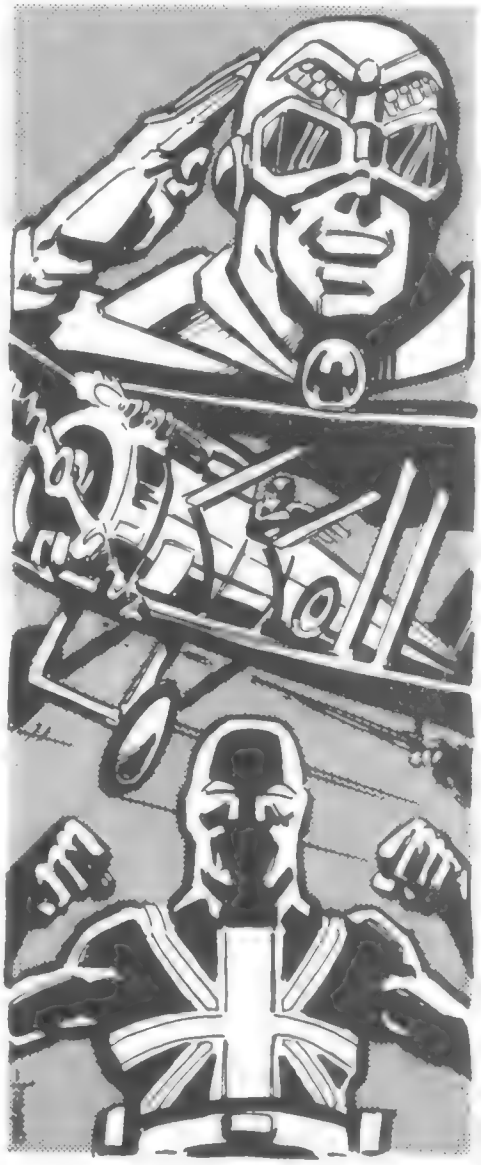
At the outbreak of World War I, Jerard decided to continue the family tradition by becoming a special agent for the British armed forces. However, he refused to take on the identity of the Black Knight, believing that the title was properly Quentin's as long as he lived. Jerard fought under the name of Sir Steel, and was of great value to the Allied war effort. He was often accompanied on his missions by Quentin's son Theodore (b. 1901), known as the Silver Squire. During the later years of the war they became part of a group of Allied special agents called Freedom's Five.[35]

"The information indicates...some entity...which is manipulating human society for its own purposes."

In 1918, while on a secret mission inside Germany, Jerard and Theodore were discovered and nearly captured by German military forces; during their escape, Theodore was badly wounded. Desperate, Jerard managed to get his nephew to the home of a German woman named Helga Blazer. Helga was the sister of Karl Kaufman, an American friend of the Garretts and, in his identity of the Phantom Eagle, a fellow member of Freedom's Five. Although she was married to Georg Blazer, a German military officer and war hero, Helga was an Allied sympathizer; her brother Karl knew this, and had told Jerard and Theodore about her before they left England.

Helga agreed to shelter the two Englishmen until Theodore was well enough to travel. This took several weeks, during which time she and Jerard had a passionate affair. After Sir Steel and the Silver Squire left, Helga discovered she was pregnant. Jerard's child by Helga Blazer was Bertolt Blazer, born in 1919 in the United States (Helga had divorced her husband and moved there after the war); he later changed his name to Barton Blaze. His son is John Blaze (b. 1949), the Ghost Rider, a member of the superhero group known as the Champions. John Blaze seems to have acquired superpowers by supernatural means, but the details are obscure to us.[36]

Shortly after the end of the war, Quentin Garrett was murdered and the Ebony Blade stolen. When Jerard and Theodore discovered the crime, the ghost of Sir Percy appeared in Castle Garrett to inform them that the perpetrator was a sorcerer who intended to sacrifice a human being with the blade in order to unleash Modred's power on the world. Aided by their colleague Lord Falsworth (who served the British in World War I as Union Jack,[37] another member of Freedom's Five), the Garretts managed to track down Modred's pawn before the fatal ritual was completed. The sorcerer fought back by conjuring up a fire-demon to destroy them. It attacked and killed Jerard, but then unpredictably turned on its master,

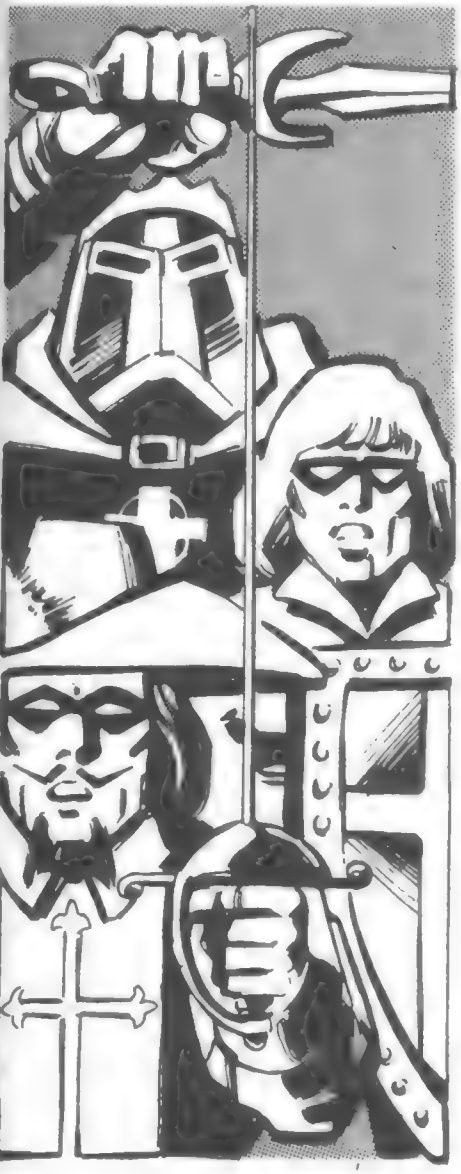


killing him as well. When the demon began to move towards the sorcerer's intended sacrificial victim—an infant girl—Theodore managed to seize the Ebony Blade and slay the creature with it.

Theodore and Falsworth never discovered the identities of the sorcerer or the infant; they were in actuality Walter Bentley and his daughter Katherine. The girl was later adopted by Theodore's aunt Deborah and her husband Charles Joyce, a wealthy American traveler and journalist. She was given the name Madeline Joyce and raised in the United States, where she became the superhero Miss America. Later she married Robert Frank and had three children: "Nuklo" (a deformed mutant), and Wanda and Pietro.

Shaken by the deaths of his father and uncle, Theodore left England and settled in the United States. He married an American woman and had two children, Jerard (b. 1923) and Nathan (b. 1925). In 1941 Jerard eloped with Tara Worthington, the daughter of a wealthy California businessman. While still on their honeymoon, Jerard was killed by a gunman hired by Tara's father, and the marriage was quickly annulled. When it was discovered that Tara was pregnant, she was immediately married to Kendall Whitman, a family friend. The child, Dane Whitman (b. 1942), grew up believing that Kendall Whitman was his true father. Jerard's brother Nathan, then sixteen, was aware of these facts, but thought it safer to ignore them rather than confront the Worthington family. He was occasionally permitted to see Dane, and over the years they became quite close. When Dane was fourteen, Nathan convinced Tara to tell him who his true father was.

Nathan became a respected scientist, but his career was ruined in 1963 when he was convicted of smuggling American nuclear secrets to the Chinese. He later became a supervillain, hoping to take revenge on the man who arrested him—Dr. Henry Pym, also known (at that time) as Giant-Man.[38] It is a measure of Merlin's power that, although Nathan was far removed from Castle Garrett



"We have discovered a number of wholly unexpected genealogical links among a variety of extraordinary individuals."

and the family history, he too used the name of the Black Knight. Nathan also became a member of the Masters of Evil, a collection of supervillains who battled the Avengers.[39]

Over the years Nathan was increasingly plagued with regret over the direction his life had taken. In 1968, dying of injuries sustained in a battle with Iron Man, he contacted Dane Whitman and told him the story of his criminal career. After Nathan's death, Dane fulfilled his uncle's last request by modifying the Black Knight's equipment for his own use and becoming a superhero.[40] Later that year, this new Black Knight briefly joined the reorganized Masters of Evil as a ruse to aid the Avengers.[41]

After his first few successful adventures, Dane discovered that adjusting to his new role was more difficult than he had anticipated, and decided to give it up. However, while visiting England in early 1969, he stopped to inspect Castle Garrett, which he had inherited through Nathan's estate. There he was confronted by the ghost of Sir Percy, who revealed their kinship and urged

© 1978 Marvel Comics Group

him to take on the identity of the Black Knight once again, to fight Modred's awakening power. Dane also found the Ebony Blade, which his grandfather Theodore Garrett had left in the castle almost half a century earlier.[42]

Dane Whitman is a member of the Avengers, and has been associated with the Defenders. In 1973 he traveled into the past by mystic means, and has not yet returned.

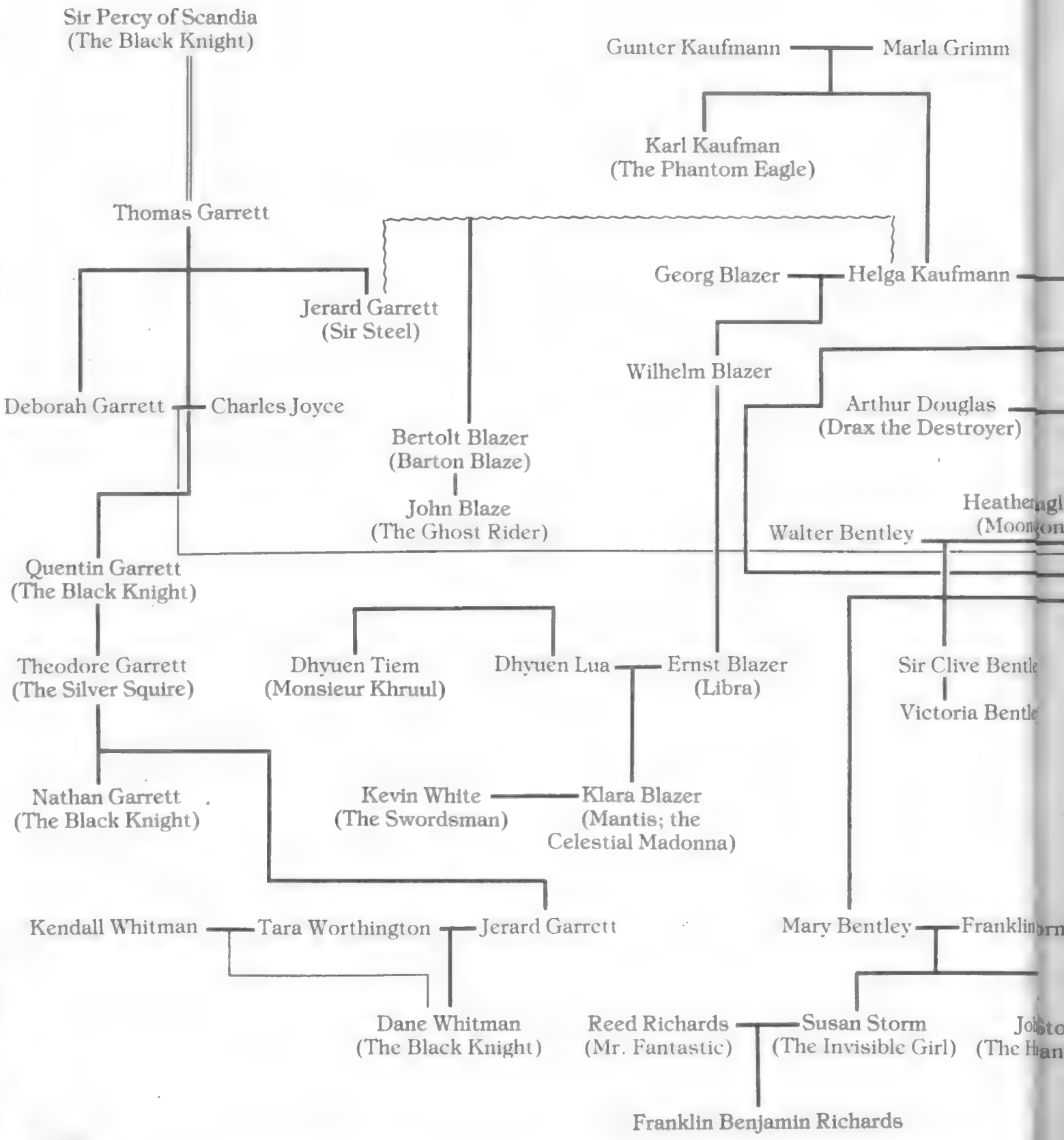
Kaufman

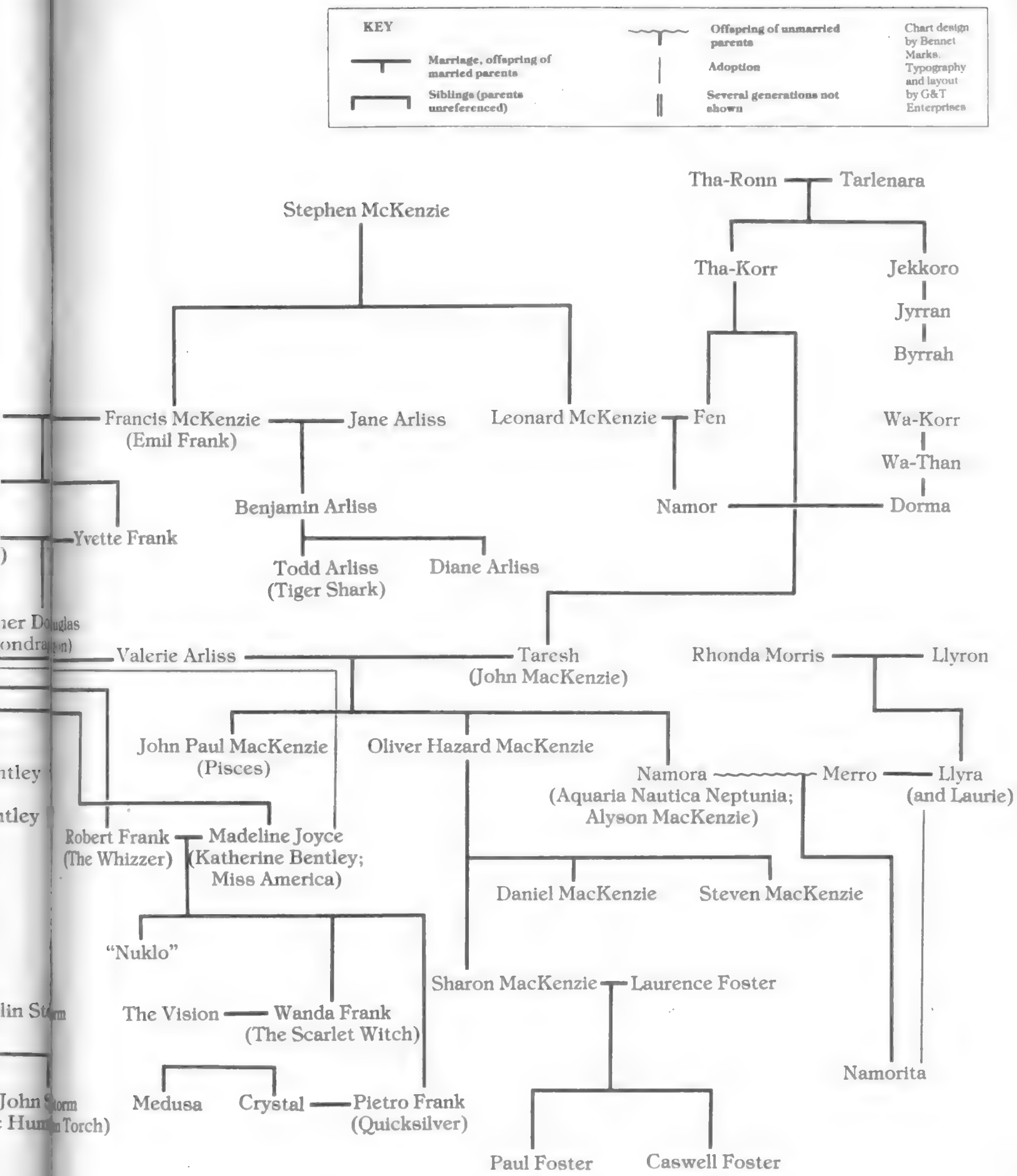
In 1893, Gunter Kaufmann (b. 1861), a German structural engineer, moved to the United States to take a job with the architectural firm of Miller & Strange, Inc. With him were his wife Marla (b. 1860), and his daughter Helga (b. 1889). Marla was pregnant, and their son Karl Kaufmann (later "Kaufman") was born in 1894.

Gunter stayed with Miller & Strange until 1909, when he and Marla decided to return to Germany. Helga chose to accompany her parents home, but 15-year old Karl, thoroughly American and

GENEALOGICAL CHART

Report to the Priesthood, Figure 1




KEY
Marriage, offspring of married parents
Siblings (parents unreferenced)
Offspring of unmarried parents
Adoption
Several generations not shown
Chart design by Bennet Marks. Typography and layout by G&T Enterprises
Tha-Ronn
Tarlenara
Stephen McKenzie
Tha-Korr
Jekkoro
Jyrran
Byrrah
Francis McKenzie (Emil Frank)
Jane Arliss
Leonard McKenzie
Fen
Wa-Korr
Wa-Than
Benjamin Arliss
Namor
Dorma
Yvette Frank
Todd Arliss (Tiger Shark)
Diane Arliss
Valerie Arliss
Taresh (John MacKenzie)
Rhonda Morris
Llyron
John Paul MacKenzie (Pisces)
Oliver Hazard MacKenzie
Namora
Merro
Llyra (and Laurie)
(Aquaria Nautica Neptunia; Alyson MacKenzie)
Robert Frank (The Whizzer)
Madeline Joyce (Katherine Bentley; Miss America)
Daniel MacKenzie
Steven MacKenzie
"Nuklo"
Sharon MacKenzie
Laurence Foster
The Vision
Wanda Frank (The Scarlet Witch)
Namorita
Medusa
Crystal
Pietro Frank (Quicksilver)
Paul Foster
Caswell Foster

anxious to finish high school with his friends, was permitted to remain behind in the care of neighbours. In 1911 Helga married Georg Blazer, a German army officer; they had one child, a son, Wilhelm (b. 1912).

In 1917, when it became likely that the United States would soon enter World War I, Karl, a trained flyer, wanted to join the new American Army Corps, but feared possible German retaliation against his parents and sister. To protect them he flew under the name of the Phantom Eagle,[43] keeping his true identity hidden. The Phantom Eagle quickly rose to prominence, both as a distinguished flying ace and a mysterious heroic symbol. Later in the war he helped organize Freedom's Five, a team of Allied special agents.

Through American intelligence sources Karl was in contact with his sister Helga, an Allied sympathizer. In August of 1918 he gave her name and address to Sir Steel and the Silver Squire (Jerard and Theodore Garrett), fellow members of Freedom's Five who were about to embark on a dangerous mission into German territory. While on that mission the Silver Squire was seriously injured, and he and Sir Steel were forced to seek refuge at the Blazer home. Helga, whose husband Georg was fighting in Belgium, permitted the Garretts to hide there until Theodore had recovered. During their stay, Helga was surprised to find herself drawn into an intense personal and sexual relationship with Jerard Garrett. After he and Theodore returned to England, she found she was pregnant. Georg, returning home after the war's end, was of course aware that Helga's unborn child was not his, although he had no idea who the actual father was. He loved Helga and wished to keep the family together, but they were already estranged on political grounds, and this fresh abuse eventually destroyed their marriage. In 1919 he granted her a divorce.

Helga's brother and parents had died shortly before the end of the war, shot down when the Phantom Eagle tried to smuggle Gunter and Maria Kaufmann out of Germany. Leaving her son Wilhelm in Georg's custody. Helga traveled to England, hoping to find Jerard Garrett. But he had been killed about a year earlier in battle with a sorcerer. Friendless and alone, she drifted to the United States, vaguely intending to locate Theodore Garrett, or perhaps some childhood friends. She eventually settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where her son Bertolt Blazer was born in 1919, and where she met and later married Emil Frank (formerly Francis McKenzie), a young doctor and a professor of anthropology and medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. They had two children, Robert and Yvette. Robert's children were "Nuklo," Wanda, and Pietro; Yvette's daughter was Heather Douglas.

Sensitive to American anti-German sentiment in the 1930's, Bertolt Blazer changed his name to Barton Blaze. He had one son, John Blaze, the Ghost Rider. Bertolt's half-brother Wilhelm, raised in Germany by his father, also had one son: Ernst Blazer (b. 1932). Ernst was fascinated by the stories of his grandfather Georg's World War I heroics, and in 1952 he left home to fight in Viet Nam as a French-employed mercenary. There he met and married Dhyuen Lua, a native of Saigon. Their daughter Klara Blazer was born in 1953.

Lua was the sister of Dhyuen Tiem, a Vietnamese crimelord known to the European authorities as Monsieur Khruul.[44] Tiem violently disapproved of Lua's marriage on racial grounds, and in 1953 he directed his men to set fire to the Blazer's home. Lua died in the attack; Ernst was blinded by flamethrowers, but managed to escape into the jungle with three-month old Klara. Several days later he stumbled onto our monastery and was granted shelter.

Our priests trained Ernst in the arts of *sei-tyon* and *leyvon-tu*, so that he might defend himself and prosper despite his blindness. After leaving us he joined the criminal organization Zodiac under the name of Libra.[45]

Klara Blazer we renamed Mantis, and taught her our every art and discipline. In 1970 she left the isolation of the Temple in order to experience more fully the nature of human existence. While living in Saigon she met Kevin White, the Swordsman, a former member of the Avengers. Together they went to the United States and joined the Avengers, with whom Mantis learned the arts of courage, love and sacrifice.

After the Swordman's tragic death, Mantis encountered Immortus, and under his timeless guidance learned the origins of our order on Hala. When her education was complete she returned to the Temple, married the Swordsman —whose lifeless body had been reanimated by the spirit of the Elder Cotati— and ascended to the role of the Celestial Madonna.[46]

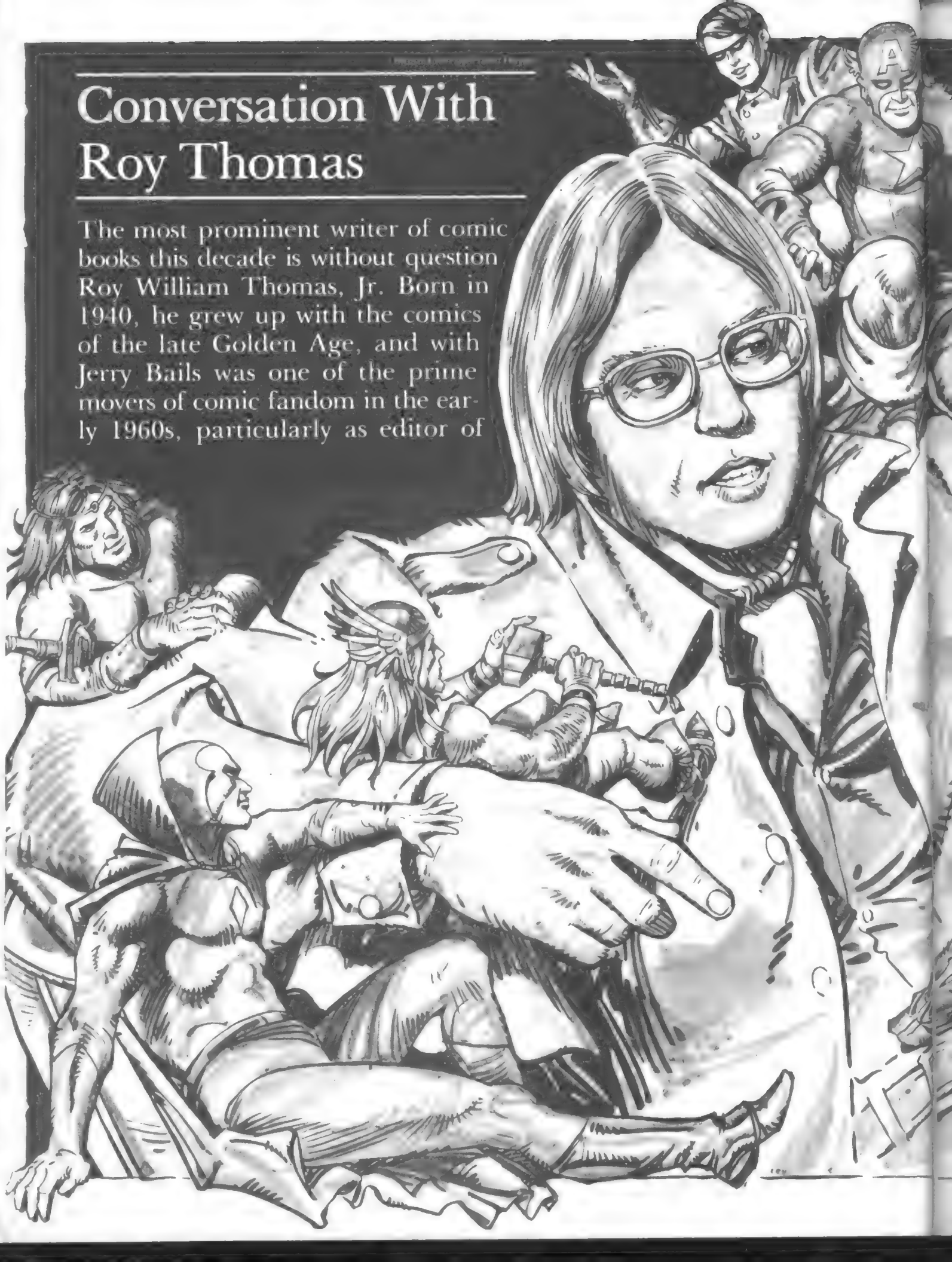
We await the child. ■

Bennet Marks
840 Coleman Ave. #16
Menlo Park, CA 94025
January 20, 1978

NOTES

1. *Marvel Comics* #1, 1939.
2. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #1, 1968.
3. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #44, 1971.
4. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #36, 1954. The date is well-established but the year is not. 1922 is the best choice, and the date 2/2/22 has numerological interest. This date was noticed by Dick O'Malley while preparing a survey article to appear in a forthcoming *Collector's Dream*.
5. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #5, 1968.
6. *U.S.A. Comics* #1, 1941.
7. *Giant-Size Avengers* #1, 1974.
8. In *Strange Tales* #151, 1966, it is revealed that Umar had been defeated by her arrogant brother Dormammu sometime previous to the latter's battle with Eternity. She was consigned to a nameless dimension in which the flow of time is "immeasurable." If the battle between Umar and Dormammu took place shortly after 1950, it would explain why Umar's Alpine cult failed to survive.
9. In *Giant-Size Avengers* #1, 1974, Robert Frank never conclusively demonstrates that Wanda and Pietro are his children; all the inferences are Wanda's. Therefore the possibility exists that the twins in fact are not his children, and the birth year discrepancy would require another explanation. Forthcoming issues of *Avengers* may resolve this question.
10. *X-Men* #4, 1963.
11. *Avengers* #16, 1965.
12. *Fantastic Four* #150, 1974.
13. *Giant-Size Avengers* #4, 1975.
14. *Captain Marvel* #32, 1974.
15. *Avengers* #135, 1975.
16. *U.S.A. Comics* #1, 1941.
17. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #45, 1972.
18. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #37, 1971.
19. *Marvel Mystery Comics* #82, 1947.
20. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #51, 1972.
21. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #13, 1969.
22. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #51, 1972.
23. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #32, 1970.
24. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #51, 1972.
25. *Sub-Mariner Comics* #9, 1969.
26. *Black Knight Comics* #1, 1955.
27. *Marvel Mystery Comics* #49, 1943.
28. *Marvel Super-Heroes* #13, 1968.
29. Though Madeline Joyce was in her twenties when she began her exploits as Miss America, the writers who described her accounts in Timely Comics made her a teenager to generate more reader empathy.
30. *Strange Tales* #114, 1963.
31. *Fantastic Four* #32, 1964.
32. *Fantastic Four* (Annual) #6, 1968, and *Fantastic Four* #94, 1970.
33. *Black Knight Comics* #1, 1955.
34. *Marvel Super-Heroes* #17, 1968.
35. *Invaders* #7, 1976.
36. *Marvel Spotlight* #5, 1972.
37. *Invaders* #7, 1976.
38. *Tales to Astonish* #52, 1964.
39. *Avengers* #6, 1964.
40. *Avengers* #48, 1968.
41. *Avengers* #54, 1968.
42. *Marvel Super-Heroes* #17, 1968.
43. *Marvel Super-Heroes* #16, 1968. He was particularly worried about his parents, who lacked his sister's husband's military connections.
44. *Avengers* #123, 1974.
45. *Avengers* #123, 1974.
46. *Giant-Size Avengers* #4, 1975.

Conversation With Roy Thomas



The most prominent writer of comic books this decade is without question Roy William Thomas, Jr. Born in 1940, he grew up with the comics of the late Golden Age, and with Jerry Bails was one of the prime movers of comic fandom in the early 1960s, particularly as editor of

Alter Ego, one of the best of the early fanzines. A graduate of South Eastern Missouri State College, he entered the ranks of comic professionals in 1965, working for two weeks as editorial assistant to Mort Weisinger. After doing a few scripts for Charlton, he came to Marvel as an assistant editor and writer, and he has been with them ever since. He has won more fan and professional writing awards than we could ever list in this small space, and he has been the principal architect of the Marvel Universe during the 1970s. His introduction of Conan the Barbarian into comics may be regarded as his most significant contribution in a life dedicated to making comics readable and enjoyable.

We were able to corner him at the 1977 San Diego Comic Convention, where he told us not to expect much depth or profundity in his interview, just conversation. Sure enough, within a very few minutes he had filled our tape with his rapid-fire sentences (the bane of transcribers!), commenting on everything from working at Marvel to reading *All-Star Comics*. Depth and profundity we were not looking for; *interest* we were, and we got it by the carload.

T Frutti

George Olshevsky: Conan the Barbarian is the Marvel character with whom you are most closely associated, the one whose introduction into comics was one of the more significant events in the history of the field and perhaps your biggest contribution. As of this time you've scripted over 80 issues of the title and there seems to be no end in sight. How do you feel about the character?

Roy Thomas: In some ways, I regret being *so* closely tied to Conan and having *that* be the book I've done the most with. I would rather it had been a character that I had made up myself. But for some reason I never stayed with the characters I made up; I always ended up doing characters created by other people.

G.: Well, one could almost consider Conan to be *your* character now.

R.: I'll drink to that!

G.: Seriously. Robert E. Howard wrote only about two dozen Conan stories and novellas, and one novel. He certainly didn't write anything like your two thousand pages.

R.: Yes; *Gone With the Wind* twice. Don't forget that there are more words on his pages than on mine—but then I have an artist to fill in the gaps with the drawing.

The important fact which remains is this: We have sold more copies of Conan in comic book form than have ever been sold in terms of paperbacks, hardcovers, anthologies and so forth, including all those original *Weird Tales* issues. We have sold some 10-20 million copies of the comics, while the total sales in other forms account for only a few million at most. It will take them some years to catch up, if indeed they ever do.

But in a way it *is* and *isn't* Conan, if you know what I mean. It will always be Conan, and yet at the same time it will always be a character that someone else made up and of which I'm just doing an interpretation, where *my* interpretation is not strictly authentic and not

©1978 Roy W. Thomas, Jr.

the *only* interpretation. I'm not too happy about that.

But, as I said earlier, I have never made up any character myself that I really wanted to stay with. I dislike making up characters and then losing control of them—something I have come to realize only after working for Marvel for several years. So it was not just nostalgia which would make me take a name like the Vision and make up a new character out of it. There was also the fact that if I had a character that I really liked, I would have hated to give up full rights to it. I was always aware of the Siegel/Shuster lawsuit, and I found the whole system just appalling. When you think about it, if Stan Lee were to quit tomorrow, he would not get another penny for Spider-Man. Jack Kirby never got anything out of the characters he created for DC after he left.

It is a shame that there's nothing like "royalties" in the comics field. We all know the reason is that comics do not make a huge amount of money per book anymore.

G.: The *creation* of a comic book character is after all a minor event. It is sustaining the character, building him and developing him, making making him salable, that is the real challenge.

R.: Sure. That is another reason I never bothered with creating characters—anybody can do it. I could make up five or ten characters in just a couple of days. Three years ago, when I was thinking of going to work for Atlas, I sat down one day and made up a number of characters any one of which would have been more commercially successful than the ones they had. That wasn't hard; the hard part would have been to make sure I had the right artist, and the right writer if I were not writing it myself, to do what I felt should be done. Given all this, they would certainly have been successful within the parameters of production and distribution that Atlas had. Making up the characters was very, very simple.

And that is something I am most happy with concerning Conan: the mere *survival* of the comic over a period of seven years, not to mention the fact that it has become one of the most popular magazines on the stands. *That* I am happy about.

G.: It is good to have the knack for going back and bringing characters out of the past from various places, from Timely, from Howard, from Burroughs—

R.: Don't forget Gullivar Jones; I have to thank Dick Lupoff for that one!

G.: —right, Gullivar Jones— and making reasonable, viable characters out of them.

R.: Partly, it is the challenge of proving it can be done. The right person could take anything and turn it into a good comic book, if he wanted to.

T Frutti

"At Marvel I never had to plan what I was going to do when I came into the office."

G.: Let me say that I generally dislike raw adaptations into comics of stories which have already been done in another medium. It seems to me a kind of perversion rather than a creative act.

R.: Well, that may or may not be.

G.: Let me clarify a bit. If what was said over *here* is not very interesting, and you adapt it into comics and *make* it interesting, then that certainly is a creative act. What I rail against are the adaptations which attempt to cash in on something already commercially successful. Very rarely does it happen that they go beyond what has already been said; almost always they turn out to be cheap imitations which by their very existence downgrade the original. A case in point would be Marvel's monster books.

R.: Yes.

G.: The way I saw the situation—and I do not know how correct I am—was that Jim Warren was having phenomenal success with his monster books *Creepy* and *Eerie*—

R.: "Phenomenal" would be a great exaggeration. Jim Warren has never had phenomenal success with anything. He *survives*.

G.: —and that Marvel wanted to enter this field.

R.: That's true. I am not saying that it was not influenced by Warren, but it was not a phenomenal success. We had expanded the heroes about as far as we felt we could. If we were going to go in new directions, one direction would certainly be the monster field. We had never been allowed to do monsters until the Comics Code was changed a few years ago, and it was the most natural thing in the world to try to see if we could do something new there, something which was in between what Warren was doing and our own superhero books.

For example, the first thing we did was adapt Dracula. The second was not

an adaptation but a genuine Marvel creation—I don't necessarily mean it was a *great* thing—the *Werewolf By Night* series. That lasted 43 issues and would, perhaps, still be going had I stayed with it. The *Werewolf* book I consider to be a true milestone. Now, you might or might not like a milestone. It is merely something that is there which says, "This is the first." Werewolf was the first original continuing character made up for comics who was a monster. People might say, "Well, it's just a copy of *I Was a Teen-Age Werewolf*," but when you think about it, nobody else had ever done a werewolf or a vampire as a *continuing* character. Sure, there are hundreds of comics, Warrens and ECs and many others, which feature horror stories. But never the same monster month in and month out.

It was my intention to explore the trials and tribulations of being a werewolf—much like Spider-Man, only bitten by a radioactive wolf (laughter) instead of a radioactive spider. That was obvious when I did it. But once I had it plotted with Mike Ploog, I lost all interest in writing it and gave it over to Gerry Conway to script. I have never actually written that strip myself, even though I totally made it up, right down to the supporting characters. My ex-wife helped a bit, but it was fundamentally my own concept.

G.: *Werewolf By Night* was the second most successful Marvel monster book, in terms of the length of its run. The first would have to be *Tomb of Dracula*, which has become superb.

R.: *Werewolf* was only recently cancelled, and as I said, with a little push, a little adjusting, it could still be going on. It could still be revived at any time.

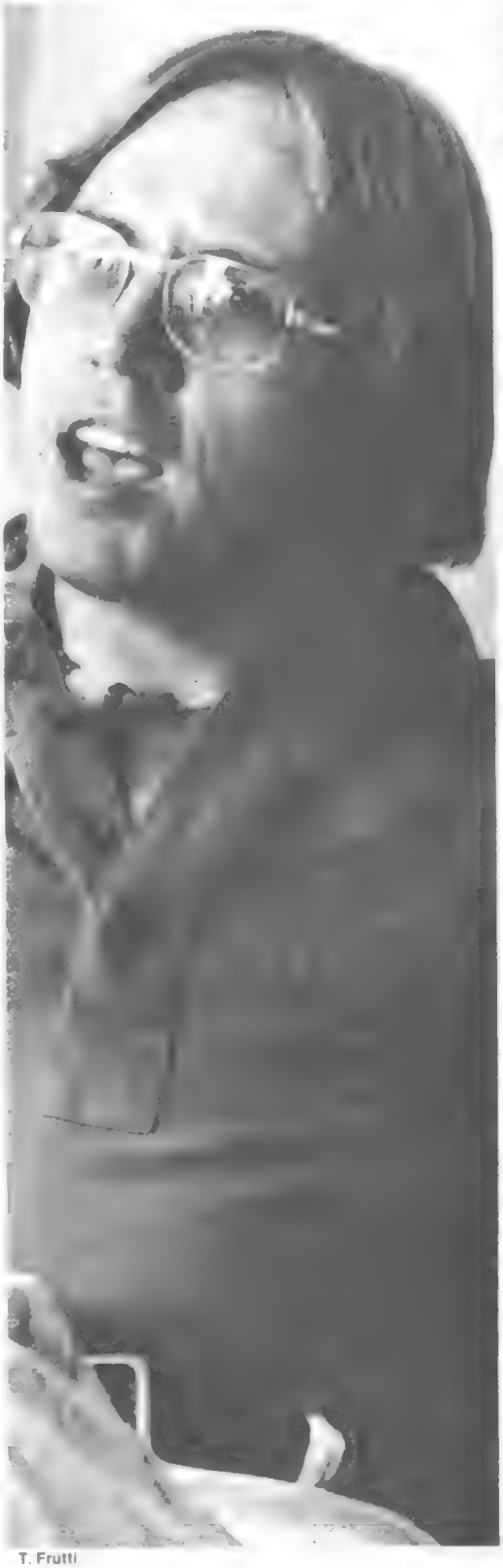
If I were interested in getting into other things, I would enjoy taking over some of the comics I started off which are now in other hands, or bringing back to life a few of the books I created which have died.

G.: What are some of those?

R.: There's Iron Fist. I didn't want to do a Kung Fu superhero; I just wanted to make one up. Having made one up, I again lost interest, much like the father who loses interest after conception. (Laughter) The Man-Thing was the same way. Stan wanted a book called *Man-Thing*. He hadn't the vaguest idea of what it would be, except some kind of "thing." Of course, we already had a *Thing*. I didn't like the idea too much, but decided on a Theodore Sturgeon it/Heap type of creature. I did a page by page breakdown for Gray Morrow—that was the way he wanted it—but then I gave it to Gerry Conway to script. So I am not even identified in the credits.

I also had a lot to do with the Power Man character, though not as much as Archie Goodwin. I thought of the name Cage, and his powers I took from the Gladiator paperback hero; Archie added the prison and the rest. Stan's part was to say, "Do a black superhero!" That was all right, because Archie and I could handle the rest of it from there and just get his approval.

> "I am not really big on the responsibilities of a comic book writer... I have sometimes found that the theorists fail to deliver in other areas."



T. Frutti

And Warlock. Warlock was almost totally changed by Jim Starlin—with my blessings! He did a marvelous job.

Being in on the creation of all those characters was a lot of fun, but I somehow never had any real desire to write them. I would always end up writing Conan.

G.: And Red Sonja.

R.: Red Sonja is probably the one character which I write, although right now I just collaborate, which I consider, despite official disclaimers, as being totally my own creation. Except for the name, there is almost nothing in the stories that is intrinsic to Robert E. Howard. If Howard had never written a story with a character named Red Sonya in it, I probably would have made her up anyway. Right down to the flaming red hair, because Valeria has yellow hair, Belit has black hair, and brown hair is dull. Heroes never have brown hair, except Green Lantern! Red Sonya was such a perfect name that all I did was change the spelling slightly to put my own personal stamp on it. If I had to do it all over again, I would probably do it a bit differently and give her a different name entirely, just in order to say that it was my creation in the Robert E. Howard milieu.

That's something to be proud of—creating the first successful woman character at Marvel or DC in the last twenty years, the first one to last longer than a year in her own comic. Now, of course, Ms. Marvel is there, too, but Red Sonja came first. Everything else died—Shanna, the Cat, Night Nurse.

G.: Red Sonja has elements that Shanna and the Cat never had.

R.: Yes, but if the right team had got on them, just the right team. What they could have been ...

Tony Frutti: Speaking of "the right team," how did you get along with Barry Smith?

R.: We got along really excellently. I think we had perhaps one argument, lasting about one minute, during the entire time we worked together. There were problems with Marvel on his side, but it never got personal and for the most part things worked out well. Some

T Frutti

problems arose later after he left, because I was still identified with Marvel and was not always on his side. Barry felt you had to be totally with him; otherwise you were totally against him. I frequently was caught in the middle.

Obviously, I admired his work tremendously. He was a fantastic storyteller. Sometimes I thought he overworked his stuff too much. The real shame of that was not the work itself, which was superb, but simply that his style became so ornate that he drove himself out of the business. This is also true of Steranko and many others: Their style became so detailed, and it took them so long to do what they did, that there was no way even with a good rate, even with the top rate, even with *more* than the top rate, they could stay in comics and make the kind of money they felt they wanted to make. If John Buscema wanted to draw a single page every couple of days, it would be one hell of a page. But John is simply not interested in doing that. He used to turn out three beautiful pages a day, and now he turns out five to seven pages of breakdowns. I don't know how long Barry spent on a page, but it kept slowing down. After a while other people had to step in and do it.

G.: Clearly Barry Smith and Steranko are perfectionists. They became very involved in what they were doing, and they wanted it to be beautiful, every page a visual masterpiece.

R.: Nothing new. One of the great well-known perfectionists who caused deadline problems was Harvey Kurtzman. Everything Harvey worked on had to be totally researched; his EC war stories are classic examples. The word at EC and at *Trump* was always, "We're working on it, we're working on it!" They would say, "Do you need it good or do need it on Tuesday?"

The trouble with comics companies is that they don't really want either one: They want it as good as you can do it by Tuesday. It's closer to journalism, perhaps, than it is to anything else, much like delivering a regular column or an article. It doesn't matter how good it is if your front page is going to be empty: "Well, the guy couldn't finish the article today, but we'll have the news for you tomorrow." Forget it!

Even the term "deadline," which is so prevalent in comics, is a newspaper term. That's how the Deadline Doom came about that's hit us all from time to time.

G.: You have been working for Marvel for some twelve years now, and there have been times when you have single-handedly run the place—

R.: Never quite single-handedly; at least one and a half hands!

G.: —so you must be gratified with the impact Marvel has made on the comic scene.

R.: I was not working for Marvel when they began publishing their current line of books in 1961. I came along a good four years after they started, so I saw their beginnings pretty much as a fan. I was a fanzine editor then, just starting *Alter Ego* with Jerry Bails. When the first issue of *The Fantastic Four* was published, I had only the foggiest notion of who Stan Lee was. I had seen his name around for years, but it meant little to me. He was the person who

"What if something had come along about 1968 or 1969 and killed off Marvel Comics? What a glorious, glorious history that would be! What a legend!"

T Frutti

wrote *My Friend Irma*, *My Girl Pearl*, and things like that. And Jack Kirby's work was not the best he had done by a long shot; he was obviously banging it out at twice the rate he ordinarily did in his best days.

Still, when that first issue appeared, I could see that the characters were *human*, with more personality than most others. Part of that clearly had to do with Jack, who brought over much of the spirit of the old *Challengers of the Unknown* series, and some of it of course was Stan. Giving depth to the personalities of the characters was and still is in many ways the the main influence of Marvel on comics today. Some of the new people seem to get stuck there; it would be nice to go beyond it, but nobody has yet found a real alternative to what Stan and Jack did.

G.: There are many attempts made to "go beyond," but few commercially successful ones.

R.: Yes. Once in a while a book appears like *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* which seems to take things a step forward. But the mix is wrong and it dies on the stands—kind of a shame, really.

G.: Speaking of the Denny O'Neil/Neal Adams GL/GA series, I must say I enjoyed the visuals—they were stunning—but the plots simply depressed me. They seemed very contrived, very trendy, *over*-relevant.

R.: They were depressing, and they were realistic, but I did not want to see comics swamped by that sort of thing.

G.: Surely realistic does not imply depressing!

R.: It depends on who you ask. Steve Gerber and Denny O'Neil might disagree with you.

G.: I live in the real world, and I am not at all depressed by it. I get pretty *cynical*, but on the whole I rather enjoy living. If other people choose to let themselves get depressed, that is their problem. They don't have to be.

R.: Right. You see what you want to see in the world.

Let me say that I am not a very profound theorist. I am not very big on the responsibilities of a comic writer, because I have sometimes found that the theorists fail to deliver in other areas. I am a very practical, pragmatic kind of writer. For example, the Deadline Doom is often used by some artists as a cop out not to get their best work done by Tuesday.

G.: It is the responsibility of the comic book writer and artist to deliver a story. I do not necessarily believe that it is the responsibility of the writer or artist to seek to change his artform or to change the world. If an author actively seeks to be profound, it is frequently at the expense of the story. When Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings*, he was by his own admission simply attempting to tell a story which would hold the reader's interest over some 1200 pages. But it nevertheless had a dramatic impact on the whole field of fantasy literature. The best changes and the most progress are arrived at serendipitously.

> "In some ways I regret being *so* closely tied to Conan and having *that* be the book I've done the most with."

T. Fruth

This is the feeling I have when, for example, I pick up late 1960s Marvels. Nobody was trying to change the world; but they *were* trying to write better comics.

R.: There were also fewer books then. You could make them *all* better. It is a real shame that, back when I became Editor-In-Chief at Marvel, they decided to expand the line almost double. I regret that; it wasn't my decision. But we did it and we made most of them sell fairly well, all things considered. I am reasonably happy with the job that was done at the time by all of us, but at the same time I wish it had been possible to stay with a relatively small number of books, just a few writers and a few artists, to keep the feel that EC had. EC was very "lucky"; they got killed off after three or four beautiful years, and now you have all this nostalgia!

Just think: What if something had come along about 1968 or 1969 and killed off Marvel Comics? What a glorious, glorious history that would be! What a legend!

G.: What is it like working at Marvel?

R.: I don't work *at* Marvel at all anymore. From 1974 on, I've tended to avoid the place like the plague—not by any means because of the people there or anything. It is just that I stepped off a pretty high pinnacle in terms of my position there, and it became a hassle to go back there.

The job of editing all of Marvel's lines was very hectic. I felt like Jimmy Cagney, you know, snapping his fingers and yelling, "Do this! This! This! This!" I was not *that* dynamic, but I would go from crisis to crisis. In a way that was excellent, because I never had to plan what I was going to do when I came into the office.

G.: It was all there just waiting for you.

R.: With rare exceptions, the only problem was to figure out which of the several crises confronting me I should deal with first. Things were not as well organized as they should have been, and I was not too good at keeping appointments. But I found myself suited to the job. I enjoyed editing some thirty or forty titles because it kept me going, even though it might have been too many titles for me to have done my best work. There are fish which live in Lake Erie because they can only live in polluted waters; put them in fresh water and they die. That is a metaphor of how things stood between Marvel and myself while I was there. (Laughter) I am not sure that is a compliment to either of us!

A lot pf people have *wanted* to be editor at Marvel—Marv, Len, Archie. But when they got there, they found that they did not care very much for it. Len Wein, of course, had health problems that hurt him. Archie Goodwin is a very talented guy, and I hope he stays there forever [*Ed. Note: He didn't.*] as Editor-In-Chief because I have an excellent relationship with him. But whenever Archie and I talked about editing a line of comics, which was when a line was a lot smaller than it is today, it always seemed to him that it meant getting bogged down.

G.: Does this explain why you left?

R.: The reasons that I left are fairly complex. You know the story of how the youths of ancient Greece built up their strength? Each day they would carry a newborn calf around a field. As the calf grew, their strength would develop, until they would reach the point where they were strong enough to carry a full-grown cow. I felt as if I were carrying a whole cow at Marvel after a while. Not to minimize the role of Stan or anyone else, but I was the only person involved on a day to day basis, one way or another, with *all* of the various threads at Marvel. Nobody since me has been involved to that extent, I guess partly because I took some of the threads with me when I left.

Stan and I got along fairly well, since we're pretty much alike in terms of our professional goals and what we would

like to do with comics. So I went to him one day and we came to a mutual understanding. You could say he fired me, and you could just as easily say I quit. *Inside Comics* got hold of it and blew it up out of all proportion, but all we basically did was agree to go our separate ways. Then in the same conversation, Stan offered me a position as a writer. I said I would not write for Marvel, certainly not on an exclusive basis, unless I were also my own editor. This was something he did not like, because it meant splitting up the editorship for the first time and not having one editor overseeing everything. It was my feeling that I should be responsible to Stan and to nobody else. This had nothing to do with my opinions of the other staffers, but was just a feeling I had. If they could not accommodate me, then I would take my chances with other companies. Martin Goodman at Atlas had made me an offer, and there were feelers out from DC and Warren. Economically it was better to work for Marvel, but that was not the issue at the time. So we immediately worked out a contract, and from that time forth I have generally had no complaints except for the difficulty of getting the editing and proofreading done from 3000 miles away.

G.: Didn't they want you to be Editor-In-Chief again after that?

R.: In February 1976 I was offered the job for the second time. I looked it over and said, "Hey, I'm going to have to pick up that cow and start carrying it!" (Laughter)

G.: It must have grown very heavy by then!

R.: I am not sure that it had grown much larger since I left, but it was at least a full size cow. I would have had to start over with a calf to do it comfortably. Living in California became my excuse not to resume editorship.

G.: Are you a free-lancer?

R.: No, no. I am far too insecure to ever be a free-lancer in my life!

G.: Just exactly what are some of the problems involved in working outside New York? How is that done?

R.: Ideally, if I and the other artists I am working with were on time—and lately it is mainly my fault for being late—I would be sent the original art, or more likely xeroxes of it, for proofreading. Inasmuch as I have been chronically late with things recently, Ralph Macchio, the new assistant editor, has been doing the proofreading chores. Things work out fairly well this way. There are some real boners that get through, but then there were some boners that went through when I was doing my own proofreading, too.

I want my books to be good, not just from a perfectionist standpoint, but also for sales reasons. Every error just makes them a little less attractive to the buyer. I would have a much better handle on this if I were back in New York. It is a source of endless frustration to me, but at the same time it is one of those things that I have had to accept. If I had to choose between staying in New York and coming into the office several days each week, or simply keeping in touch from 3000 miles away but having aggravations, I would prefer the latter. There are, especially among the minor personnel, some enormous resentments about the fact that I am able to live and work in California. I suppose the same is true about Jack, and probably Steve Englehart.

I know when I was there, I found it a lot harder to work with a long-distance person. But it does make a difference if the long-distance person is someone who basically knows what he is doing, and Stan decided—it was his decision and nobody else's—that I knew what I was doing well enough to be trusted with this kind of thing. After eleven years in New York, I felt I needed a change.

G.: You had some of the best writers in the field working with you at Marvel when you left.

R.: With the exception of Archie Goodwin (at the time), I was able to get practically every writer in comics that I *really* wanted working there by 1973-74. I had new people like Steve Englehart and Steve Gerber started, there were Gerry and Carla Conway, Len Wein, Tony Isabella. We had assembled a really fine team.

It is just one of those things, but no sooner do you get something ideal together than it goes off in different directions. It is some kind of unstable element. So now two or three of the really good writers, who I feel should be working for Marvel, are either over at DC like Gerry Conway, or out of the field entirely, like Steve Englehart. It is very hard to hold that kind of creative team together. You can do it for a couple of years, but eventually it dissipates. The people change, the situations change, and unfortunately you cannot stem the tide.

G.: Did you bring Steve Englehart to Marvel?

R.: No, no! He was primarily trying to be an artist. He had done one or two jobs with Neal Adams. He was a terrible artist, but he understood *story*. Steve came in as a summer replacement for Gary Friedrich, who wanted to go home to Missouri for a while. Maybe he wanted someone there who was not a writer, so he could come back in easily. He got Steve to hold down his job, but he turned out to be such a fantastic writer that I think they hated each other from that day on. At least Gary had some resentments.

Steve was a natural writer. He wrote just a few pages of a story about a pterodactyl, and I immediately saw that he

T Frutti

"If I had a character that I really liked, I would have hated to give up full rights to it. If Stan Lee were to quit tomorrow, he would not get another penny for Spider-Man. Jack Kirby never got anything out of the characters he created for DC after he left."

was good. So I gave him that Beast series, the one which died a horrible death but which started him on his way. On the other hand, not all of the stuff he did sold as well as he seemed to think it did. For example, *Dr. Strange* nearly died when Frank Brunner left it.

G.: A lot of people were really into the Brunner visuals in that comic.

R.: And that's the interesting thing about Frank. There was a time when Stan and I were convinced that Frank would never amount to anything because he was just interested in doing bad traces of Frazetta. Of course, it was not *really* that, but it looked as if the idea of telling a story was going to be totally beyond him. This was also true of Berni Wrightson at first; his Nightmaster strip was just awful. But over a period of time Frank and Berni metamorphosed themselves incredibly. With Frank it was a couple of stories he drew for Warren, while with Berni it was the mystery stories and especially Swamp Thing. It was beneficial for them to work on regular characters, and working "Marvel style" helped a lot, too. One of the reasons Frank quit doing Howard the Duck was that Steve Gerber was for reasons of his own giving him a full script in advance, and Frank could not work "Marvel style" anymore.

Speaking of "Marvel style," many artists hated the idea of working from breakdowns at first. John Buscema, who was primarily an illustrator in commercial art at the time, said he was appalled by the thought of working from just a general synopsis. But now, if we do the Conan strip together, he wants to work from a synopsis, something I can't even picture yet! In many ways a full script is a crutch. Once the artist gets used to working without it, then it frees him to do more really creative work. And when you get two people working together and they get the right fit, it is tremendous. I love working with John so much because he is like that.

G.: What *is* it like working with John Buscema?

R.: I have worked with John more than with any other artist. I don't see him very much; I only run into him on the average of once or twice a year. I have not seen him since before I left New York, and I did not see too much of him when I was in New York because he lives on Long Island. Nobody sees him very much!

I was the first person to work with him after Stan, who had done just two or three stories with him. He was given an Avengers filler issue to do, and I kept him on the book. I found something else for Don Heck, and John and I worked together. We like working together although John is not that expressive. He hates doing superheroes and I think the two strips he has hated working on most of all have been the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man. Maybe that shows his commercial sense is not always right on target. (Laughter) John Romita was always touching up his work on Spider-Man because Stan was so particular about what he wanted, and John could not see anything in it himself. He just is not interested in that kind of character.

> "Not all of the stuff Steve Englehart did sold as well as he seemed to think it did."

But he *does* like working on Conan and Tarzan. There are other things that I think he would enjoy, too. Basically, John is like Wally Wood, always constantly looking around for just the right situation in which he will be ideally happy, but never quite finding it.

There are times when I wish that the economics of the comics were such that John could make the money he wants and do things a little more slowly; hell, I wish that about myself, for that matter. If John were able to take just a little more time, he would be able to do things that are simply fantastic. As it is, at his worst he is one of the best draftsmen comics has ever seen, right up there with those people that fans worship like Lou Fine, Alex Raymond, Hal Foster.

G.: He is superlative.

R.: The reason he has a good reputation but is not much of a fan favorite as some others is that he does not ink himself enough to have a "style." He does a lot of breakdowns, which leaves him at the mercy of an inker. Also, his style several years ago during the Silver Surfer period increasingly diverged from the way he wanted to draw towards being a kind of more beautiful version of Jack Kirby's artwork. As it is, he admires Jack's work tremendously, but it is not the kind of drawing he really wants to do. But he has become an amazing combination of Jack Kirby dynamics and Hal Foster draftsmanship.

G.: *The Silver Surfer* was a truly amazing comic, not because of the visuals, which were generally excellent, but in the way it went downhill so quickly.

R.: Many fans loved John's Silver Surfer, but I feel Stan made a mistake in not having Jack do it. There are some things Jack is right for, and there are things which he is *not* right for, but it would have been a better strip because Jack would never have allowed the Surfer to become the namby-pamby weakling he became after seven or eight issues. John had begun to really hate the strip by the time he left it.

G.: It shows; it really does.

R.: It was almost like the portrait of Dorian Gray. Somewhere there must be a picture of the *ideal* Silver Surfer, since the book deteriorated so quickly!

G.: Yes, by the time the fifteenth issue of *The Silver Surfer* came out, you just wanted to hide it somewhere, even though the first seven books held some of the finest stories and art ever to grace a comic.

R.: It always amazes me when I occasionally run into an otherwise intelligent fan who does not think John Buscema is a really good draftsman or a really good comic artist. It is something else if he says his style is too plain or he does not have enough individuality; John is not trying for that, primarily. But when fans say that he cannot draw because he uses a few stock figures, it simply shows that they cannot see past the externals of the inking and the posing. It is perfectly obvious to me every time I pick up a comic book with Buscema art that this man is a superb draftsman. He should be drawing *Prince Valiant*. He would be perfect for it.

G.: Speaking of Hal Foster, how is the Tarzan book doing?

R.: I don't really know. The first issues of that and *Warlord of Mars* both sold. They were both doing quite well the last I heard. *Warlord* I understand is doing better than *Tarzan*; perhaps its time has come. I'm a little unhappy with the particular Tarzan story I am doing, now that I have gotten into it. I like the elements, but it is difficult to adapt it into few enough issues. I am looking forward to bringing in things which are a bit farther out, like *At the Earth's Core*, and writing some more original stories.

G.: Don't you think that Tarzan is a rather overworked character?

R.: Oh, terribly! John and I both like the idea of doing it, because there is a challenge there. There is a challenge to do him right and make him sell. He is one of the great characters of 20th century literature—he is so dated you have to try hard just to not make him look racist! He is a popular character, although that by itself does not guarantee sales; Sherlock Holmes is also very popular, but you could not sell a comic book about him.

The challenge is there. Sometimes I am really interested in writing it, other times I am not. I guess it depends on the week. We will have to see how it goes for a little while longer. [*Ed.Note: Roy left.*]

G.: I found *Warlord of Mars* to be a sterling book. The Gil Kane artwork is absolutely mind-boggling. Does he spend much time at it?

R.: I don't know, but I think the inkers add a lot. He certainly spends more time on it than usual. He is a lot like John Buscema; if he is working, he produces two or three pages a day, so he does not

spend very much time on individual panels. But he is a thinking artist, and he has been turned on by the idea of doing this particular series. It has done well for him; even the original pages he gets back sell quite well, so he has an additional economic investment in it. I am very pleased, because I have always felt that Gil has been somewhat underrated by the fans, like John Buscema and Ross Andru. There are many artists who are well liked by the fans whose artwork does not interest me, and there are many artists, unappreciated by fans, whose artwork I really enjoy.

G.: One book which does not seem to be a particular fan favorite but which I enjoy very much is *The Invaders*, and—

R.: It is one of my favorites, too. It is not selling as well as I would like, but it is doing all right.

G.: —and being a Timely collector, one of the things that struck me about Timelys was not that they were even remotely well drawn or well written—

R.: God knows! (Laughter)

G.: —but the fact that the characters could be extended in the context of the Marvel Universe, and I was just dying to see this happen. So when the Invaders were brought back bodily, this was a fantastic rush for me.

R.: I had access to a few bound volumes of Timelys at Marvel. That, plus the comics I remember reading as a kid and those that I saw reprinted and elsewhere, made me want to do that. I had a feeling for continuity and the great chain of being between Timely, Atlas and Marvel, and I thought that even if we could not make all the stories a part of the Marvel Universe, we could bring in the general milieu. Then I could "correct" and "update" it, create a few new characters like Spitfire and Union Jack and rearrange a few others. I wanted new characters because then I could do things with them which I could not do with the established characters like Sub-Mariner. I made the Destroyer a little different (I am not done with him yet).

But my main interest was to bring back the Human Torch, Sub-Mariner and Captain America, who were three of my favorite characters when I was growing up. Some people thought that was insincere, because they remember my many letters in DC in contrast to relatively few to Marvel. That was because I had a personal relationship with Julius Schwartz, Gardner Fox and Otto Binder.

When I was a kid my favorite comic was *All Star Comics*, and my second favorite was *Flash*. They were the only comics I bought every issue of, even when I did not have much money. I never missed a Hawkman story, and I identified with the Atom because he was little and feisty. I loved *All Star* because of the idea of a group of superheroes. *Captain Marvel* was right up there, too.

But at the same time, I had a love for Captain America, Sub-Mariner and the Human Torch. So it seemed a natural thing to bring them back and put them together in stories of the type I discovered there were almost none of during World War II. There were almost no stories featuring all three characters, even though they appeared together very frequently on covers. The closest you would get would be Subby and the Torch fighting each other, or little guest appearances here and there. There was a long time when the guest shots and fights totally died. Only in the late forties did they ever really come together, in those two issues of *All Winners Comics*. I do not ever remember seeing them on the stands, and I do not think I had read them before I picked them up in the early sixties.

G.: The All Winners Squad issues are remarkable in being the only Timelys to feature their major characters teamed up together.

R.: I really regret the fact that I let go of those two copies and never got them back. I do intend to pick them up when I get a little money together. I sold them when the price was seven or eight dollars, back in the early sixties. I knew a good deal when I saw one. (Laughter)

And I went through two or three *All Star* collections, losing money each time. I would get a complete or nearly complete collection together, and then I would sell it because the price kept going up and I needed the money. Then I would go out and get it back again, losing money each time. Finally, I bound the set in hardcover, which ruined their collector value so that I would never be tempted to let them go again!

G.: That is quite a job, putting together a complete set of *All Star*.

R.: It was not so hard a few years ago. Also, I had a little help from Phil Seuling, whom I played poker with and who is a dealer. Besides the *All Star* set, I have all the *Flash* comics from the time Joe Kubert started drawing Hawkman, and a complete collection of Harvey Kurtzman's 23 *Mad* comics.

G.: The *Mad*s are terrific!

R.: If I had one volume—forget about economic value—if I had one volume that I would grab in case of a fire, then it would be the volume of *All Star* from #33 with Solomon Grundy through #41 with the Injustice Gang. Those nine issues made a tremendous impact on me. I loved those stories; even now when I look through them, I'm suddenly seven years old again.

It amazes me that they have so much power over me, because most comics, not even *Mad*, have that kind of hold on me, much as I might enjoy them. It is ***strange***. There is something about those particular issues which makes me feel very good whenever I just pick up the volume and look through them. I never get tired of looking at them. ■

A SELECTION OF COMIC STORIES WRITTEN BY ROY THOMAS

With None Beside Me
Where Man Hath Never Trod
The Conquest of Kaluu
The Hiding Place
The Sands of Death
The Evil That Men Do
The Coming of Conan
The Shadow of the Vulture
The Dweller In the Dark
Rogues In the House
The Garden of Fear
Zukala's Daughter
Devil-Wings Over Shadizar
The Shadow Kingdom
The Ultroids Attack
To Conquer a Colossus
In Our Midst, An Immortal
With a Bang and a Whimper
The Sentinels Are Alive and Well
Whatever Gods There Be
Let Slip the Dogs of War
Take One Giant Step Backward
Judgment Day
Brain-Child to the Dark Tower Came
Come On In, the Revolution's Fine
Lo, the Lethal Legion
Heroes For Hire
Out of the Holocaust, a Hero
The Alien and the Amphibian
From the Ashes of Defeat
Here Comes the Hulk
The Mad Master of Murder Maze
And a Child Shall Lead You
Three Stood Together
Where the Sun Dares Not Shine
Battleground: the Baxter Building
Revolt In Paradise
Havoc In the Hidden Land
In One World and Out the Other
The Crusader Syndrome
The Light of Other Worlds
Where Have All the Powers Gone?
If It's Tuesday, This Must Be the Hulk
When Giants Walk the Sky
Curse of the Undead-Man
Red Sonja
At the Mountain of the Moon-God
A Witch Shall Be Born
Corsairs Against Stygia
Years of Glory, Day of Doom
On a Clear Day You Can See the Leviathan
Who Strikes For Atlantis?
The Lady and the Tiger Shark
Man-Thing
Calling the Crusaders
The Short, Happy Life of Major Victory
The Battle of Berlin
Day of Infamy, Day of Shame
And to the Vanquished, Death
The Choice and the Challenge
The Sea That Time Forgot
The Blackout Murders of Baron Blood
Red Skull In the Sunset
Twilight of the Star-Gods
His Brother's Keeper
And To All a Good Night
The Skull of Silence
Warrior of Mars
The Lurker From the Catacombs
Red Nails
The Frost Giant's Daughter
A King Comes Riding
The Death-Dance of Thulsa Doom
The Hour of the Dragon

ang nakaraan: PINUNTAHAN NG IBONG ADARNA SI ADONIS, AT NAG-ULAT ITO NANG PATULA. NALUNGKOT ANG PRINSIPENG SA NALAMANG SINAPIT NG KANILANG REYNO.
IKA-23 labas
MATAPOS UMAWIT AT TUMULA AY LUMISAN NA ANG IBONG ADARNA.
MAHIWAGANG IBON!
BABALIK SIYA, MAHAL NA PRINSIPE!

A Glance
Comic Art

If the first six years of this decade are any indication of a trend in comic art, the 1970s may well mark not only the rise of talented native Canadian and American artists such as John Byrne, Jim Starlin and Frank Brunner but also the increased recognition of artists from both Spain and the Philippines. While the Spanish artists' efforts have almost exclusively been devoted to Jim Warren's black and

Illustrations by Alex Nino

IKA-4 na labas
KAYA LAMANG NAPUKNAT SA PAG-INOM SI EMONG AY NANG MAGSARA NA ANG TINDAHAN... MAY BAON PA ITO AT PASURAY-SURAY NA...
Ang nakaraan:
ALAK ANG NAPAGBALI-NGAN NI EMONG SA KATAKSILAN NG ASA-WANG LU-MAYAS AT IWAN ANG ANAK SA KANYA.
STORE
ONG'S STORE
WHY, WHY, WHY... DELILAH z MY... MY... MY... HIK BELLA!
AT DAHIL NGA SA KALASINGAN AY MADA-LAS ITONG MABALAHO SA PUTIKAN.
TSAK
MAYO PA RIN... PARA BANG BATIS NA PAGKA-LINAW-LINAW NA TU-BIG ANG KINAHU-LUGAN.
HIK! SARAP MALIGO... HIK...

at Filipino

by Marshall F. Johnson

While line (Creepy, Eerie, and Vampirella), the Filipino artists have worked for all major companies and have exercised an influence far beyond their numbers. In this article, Marshall "Mark" Johnson, a recently discharged navyman now living near the Grand Tetons in eastern Idaho, looks at comic books in the Philippines and at one rising Filipino artist.

© 1978 Marshall F. Johnson

Few comic art collectors have failed to be moved, if not awed, by the dramatic realism of Nestor Redondo, the surreal fantasies of Alex Nino, or the woodcut precision of Alfredo Alcala. And few American artists would deny the freshness of innovation injected into the field by the Filipino artists and inkers. In order to gain even a cursory understanding of these artists we have to look at the nature of their training medium. Fanzines apparently do not exist in the Philippines; the regularly published comic books often serve that purpose.

The Filipino comic book is quite different from an American comic book, and has a much more important position in society for all age groups. One of the major differences stems from the fact that there is very little television in the Philippines; few could afford a set even if there were stations throughout the country. The comic book takes the place of television for many (a majority?) of the Filipino peoples. Comics are published weekly, and most stories run an average of three to five pages—"to be continued"—often going on for months before being resolved. Continued characters are virtually unknown and superheroes do not exist (except in some science fiction tales). Soap-opera-type stories abound with some rather "taboo" subjects such as adultery being discussed. Gag pages, reminding one of some Archie pages—with a Filipino flavor, of course—are numerous.

Another major difference is that comic books in the Philippines are something of a hybrid between graphic art stories and gossip about Filipino movie stars. The covers are always four-color photos of the stars (with *occasional* comic art vignettes near the bottom) with teasers: "What Makes Joseph Estrada Smile?" and "Vilma Santos: Upcoming Silent Millionairess?" Inside are a multitude of articles, gossip columns, and horoscopes. Occasionally a magazine will publish (propaganda or national pride?) something similar to the recent four-part story in *Pilipino Komiks* on the life and rise of President Ferdinand Marcos, current leader of the Philippines.

One possible reason for the extreme popularity of comic books in the Philippines is their cost—about a dime for 44 pages. Few are in full color (a notable exception is the aforementioned *Pilipino Komiks*, a recent newcomer to the market), but most have some full-color pages. Most pages are in black and white or monochrome (black with red/pink highlights). Few of the Filipino comics have slick covers; most content themselves with the same pulp stock as is used in the interior.

One pleasing difference is in advertising. Ads take up less space proportionally than in American comics and their diversity is in keeping with the wide audience. It is not at all unusual to see advertisements for cigarettes, baby bottles, or Aji-no-moto (a flavor-enhancer for food, made from seaweed). And many of the comics in the Philippines have no ads at all, with no perceptible difference in price or quality.

As mentioned above, comics are read by people in all walks of life in the Philippines. When I was there, it seemed to me that every shopgirl had her copy under the counter for times when business was slack. Housewives read them on the bus and school children carry them with their textbooks. Many more women read comics than men—at least in public.

One last curiosity about comics in the Philippines is that they are written

© 1978 Affiliated Publications, Inc.

in two languages (sort of): Tagalog and English. This is not to say that some books are in one and some in the other, or even different stories in different tongues. Mostly Tagalog is used but English keeps slipping in. Since English is still the official government language of documents and the courts (though this is changing rapidly), and since English is the second tongue to most people in the Philippines, it makes itself known right in the middle of conversations in an often amusing way. In one page of Alex Nino's art that I own, the hero, just before falling drunkenly in a mud puddle, is singing the American song "Delilah" (*United Komiks* #235, p. 22).

I first became acquainted with Filipino comics in 1975/1976 when the U.S. Navy had the foresight to send me (and my ship, of course) to the Philippines for a six-month tour. Having collected comics for a number of years, I was anxious to meet some of the new Filipino artists, so I asked Gary Arlington of the San Francisco Comic Book Company whom he knew over there. He kindly gave me the address of Steve Gan.

Steve Gan is best known to comic fandom as the inker of Marvel's *Conan* #58-63 and for his superb rendition of Solomon Kane in *Savage Sword of Conan* #13. A few letters passed between Steve and me which resulted in his invitation to visit him in San Juan, a suburb of Manila. Since I was planning to pass through Manila on my way to revisit Pagsanjan Falls (one of the most beautiful spots in Southeast Asia), I phoned Steve. He met me at the bus station, and took me to his home.

INDEX OF STEVE GAN'S WORK IN AMERICAN COMICS

Conan (inks only): #58-63
Dracula Lives (full art): #12-13
Marvel Premiere (Satana): #27 (art with "Tribe")
Marvel Premiere (Legion of Monsters): #23 (inks)
Marvel Preview (Blade): #5 (art with two assistants from "Tribe")
Marvel Preview (Starlord): #4 (art with three assistants from "Tribe")
Savage Sword of Conan: #1 (1-pager), #5 (inks with "Tribe"), #13 (full art)
Savage Tales: #6-9, 11-12 (full art)
Skull the Slayer: #1, 2, 6 (full art) (#3 is not by Gan despite credits)

For the next four hours or so, comics, the graphic arts, and the plight of the Filipino artists were the major topics of conversation. Due to customs regulations I was unable to take a cassette recorder off the base, so no real "interview" could be done. But, since our afternoon was more one of friends getting together rather than a formal question/answer session, we didn't feel the loss. His most gracious mother fixed us some excellent impromptu Chinese food—Steve is of Chinese-Filipino extraction—and we sat amidst stacks of magazines, portfolios, and books on the graphic arts luminaries.

Steve turned out to be a week younger than I (both of us turned 31 last May), and a man very concerned with the difficulties of being a foreign artist contributing to the American comic art field. He is an enthusiastic admirer of Frazetta, Hal Foster, and Al Williamson. Also well-represented in his collection are Frederic Remington (who really influenced some sections of Steve's recent work "Jeronimo") and Howard Pyle, both turn-of-the-century romantic realists.

Illustration by Steve Gan 1978 Marvel Comics Group

Illustration by Ruben Yandoc © 1978 Affiliated Publications, Inc.

Although we covered a considerable amount of ground that afternoon, the main topic (due more to my repeatedly steering the conversation in that direction than to Steve's desire to talk about it) was his decision to sever ties with Marvel in the middle of illustrating a brand new feature.

The reason is a simple one having to do with the way Filipino art is marketed in the United States. Filipino artists generally deal with Marvel and DC through middlemen, who are supposed to coordinate the efforts of the artists for whom they are agents. This makes it easier to deal with the artists, who are located all over the Philippines; American companies need to contact only one person rather than many.

In the previous year, one of the "Philippine Bullpens" broke up after the system began to fail to provide the artists with a fair return for their efforts. The middlemen (no names, please!) had been taking as much as 50% commission, or failing to pay the artists for their work altogether. Some Filipino artists have found it necessary to come to the United States (and to Canada [*Ed. Note: Franc Reyes, one of our regular artists, is one of these.*]) to deal directly with the publishers themselves. Others have stopped selling their work in the United States entirely, preferring to work exclusively for the local comics. This situation threatens to deprive the American comic industry of some of the best and most progressive creative talents.

Steve Gan was one of the latter. After completing the pencils for the first eleven pages of Marvel's Dragon Flower (a female Kung Fu fighter), he quit dealing with the United States and returned to the weekly Filipino magazines. His self-suspension resulted in the reprint which popped up in *Conan* #64, since he also quit in the middle of inking what became the story in *Conan* #65. The reasons above are the "personal considerations" alluded to on the splash page of *Conan* #64.

Steve is by no means angry with Marvel, and he emphasized this more than once. The fault lies exclusively with the middlemen system. A number of years ago a similar situation developed with DC (Nestor Redondo was not involved), which caused Carmine Infantino to insist that the artists in the Philippines receive fair treatment, and that middlemen commissions be more in line with normal agents' fees (about 10%). Marvel has not yet taken a strong stand on this subject, and may lose the quality services of non-immigrant Filipino artists entirely as a result.

Steve Gan and the other illustrators have not, happily, given up completely. There is some discussion in the Philippines of forming a loosely-knit artists' cooperative, which would deal with Marvel on a uniform basis and allow the ease of coordination which Marvel finds advantageous and essential. It seems fairly clear that working through the Redondo studio would be impractical, since DC has only a limited number of jobs available (an industry-wide phenomenon, actually). Correspondence with Jim Warren has so far yielded no new results.

In the meantime Steve has been far from idle. On September 25, 1976 his new *magnum opus* "Jeronimo" debuted in the *Pilipino Reporter*. He receives the highest rate in the Filipino comic market—a lordly sixty pesos per page for a continuing feature, and seventy for short stories. Translated into dollars and cents that is a paltry (by American standards) U.S. $8.00 and U.S. $9.33 per page respectively—for both pencils and inks. But at least he is earning more than when working under the "system".

We had an engrossing and enjoyable afternoon, surely, and one which made me much more conscious of an important, and often overlooked, aspect of the business end of comics. Like many other comic art fans, I very much hope that we don't lose a significant portion of the finely-wrought efforts of the Filipino artists for less than intelligent or rational reasons. ■

Marshall F. Johnson hails from Idaho, which is distinguished by having as far as he knows "no comic book store in the entire state." Having to seek his comic books in more remote territory led to an interest in Filipino comics and original art, of which he has amassed a representative collection. Write him at Box 33, Irwin, Idaho 83428.

ARKHAM HOUSE PUBLICATIONS: A COLLECTOR'S NOTES

BY ROWLEY ATKINS

Dust wrappers photographed by Robert MacIntyre, from the collections of Ray Alexander and Rowley Atkins

THE HEIGHT OF THE SCREAM
THIS MORTAL COIL
NINE HORRORS
TRAVELLERS BY NIGHT
H.P. LOVECRAFT
L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP
BENEATH THE MOORS
Brian Lumley
THE OUTSIDER AND OTHERS
Fearful Pleasures
tales by A.F. COPPARD
THE SURVIVOR
AND OTHERS
H.P. Lovecraft and
August Derleth

The following article consists, for the most part, of gleanings from my research and personal experiences as a book collector. The opinions expressed herein are purely subjective, but the facts stated are accurate to the best of my knowledge. While I hope to be informative, in an entertaining fashion, these notes do not purport to be a definitive study of Arkham House, either its history or bibliography. For the former, we must await the pleasure of the publishers themselves. For the latter, a worthwhile effort has been made in Richard Spellman's recent checklist. But for myself, I am merely taking an informal look from the customer's point of view.

For those readers unacquainted with the subject, a short history of Arkham House, its aims and its achievements, would not be amiss at this point. It could be said to be, in terms of original intent, a memorial to one man, H.P. Lovecraft. Certainly this was the intention of the founders, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, in conceiving the venture, to keep at least part of the man alive, by ensuring that his writings would be preserved in book form.

As no major publisher would undertake the effort,[1] however, these gentlemen were required to found their own publishing house, at considerable personal expense. Arkham, the fictitious New England setting for many of Lovecraft's ghoulish goings-on, provided a name for the new enterprise. The first title, decided upon sometime before, was to be *The Outsider & Others,* an omnibus collection of his best fiction. Publication costs were met by soliciting advance pre-paid orders, a novel, and, fortunately, successful idea. The book dutifully appeared late in 1939, at $5.00 the copy (as opposed to $3.50 pre-publication), and sat like a white elephant, which by the standards of the time, it was. Expensive, and of limited appeal, it took 4 years to sell out the 1000-odd copies.

In the meantime, Derleth and Wandrei had decided to test the market for such fare, by publishing two further collections: *Sometime In The Dark,* by the former, and *Out Of Space & Time,* the first hardcover collection of Clark Ashton Smith's fantasies. Sales began to pick up, and, encouraged by the response, more ambitious publishing schedules were drawn up. The Lovecraft books were projected as a trilogy, consisting of *The Outsider, Beyond The Wall Of Sleep* (1943) and *Selected Letters* (to be issued in 1948). The last mentioned took somewhat longer to appear, however.

Wartime service removed Donald Wandrei from active participation in the firm. Derleth, now sole editor and manager, carried on, determined to establish Arkham House as *the* publisher of fantastic fiction. To this end,

© 1978 Rowley Atkins
Dust wrappers © 1978 Arkham House

he signed up the most talented young writers in the field, such as Ray Bradbury, Fritz Leiber, and Robert Bloch. Deceased greats, such as J.S. LeFanu, and pulpsters such as H.S. Whitehead and Robert E. Howard, were brought back into print. Above and beyond this, Derleth wrote to England to obtain work from Algernon Blackwood, A.E. Coppard, M.P. Shiel, and Arthur Machen, among others. *Slan*, a science-fiction novel by A.E. Van Vogt, was published in 1948. And a mystery line, Mycroft & Moran, was established, primarily to print Derleth's Solar Pons pastiches, which found a ready market among Sherlock Holmes enthusiasts. Finally, a literary quarterly, *The Arkham Sampler*, appeared, to take up the slack of stories, letters and bibliographical information which began coming in. When one considers that Derleth at this time was also lecturing, teaching, writing a weekly newspaper column, *and* producing a substantial portion of his Sac Prairie Saga, the work load must have been monumental. The financial cost certainly was.

By 1949, it was apparent that, while Arkham House was aesthetically rewarding to its proprietor, it was not financially remunerative. Other fan presses began to provide direct competition, production costs were rising, and sales were dropping. The fantasy boom had peaked, and the down-swing had begun. Accordingly, schedules were cut back, so that in the entire decade of the 50's, only 13 books were published, as opposed to 41 in the previous ten years. And of these, 10 were less than 200 pages each. Such conservative measures paid off, however, for the winter to come was long and very hard. When better days returned, about the mid-sixties, only 2 of the specialty presses survived, Arkham House, and *FPCI*.[3] Gradually, cautiously, production was stepped up again, first 3 titles in 1960, 3 more in 1961, then 4 in 1962, and so on. A small booklet of fiction and news, *The Arkham Collector*, was established in 1967. Sales began to pick up sharply in the late 60's, as the current fantasy boom began to swell. Unfortunately, August Derleth did not live to see the Lovecraft craze of the 70's, and his death in 1971 raised doubts in the minds of many as to the future of Arkham House.

Donald Wandrei became the new editor, and immediately drew up a schedule that was somewhat top-heavy with books by himself and his late brother, Howard. While several of these titles, notably *Colossus* and *Time Burial*, had been prepared sometime before, their scheduling, and particularly the manner of its presentation, smacked strongly of vanity press pretentions, something Derleth had gone to great pains to avoid. In any event, Wandrei and the Derleth estate were soon embroiled in acrimonious disputes, and he resigned as editor in 1973, taking the titles in question with him. An unfortunate episode for all concerned, as the first edition of *Colos-*

FROM BEYOND
FRANK B. LONG
CLARK ASHTON SMITH
A CHILLED STREET DOSSIER
STANLEY McNAIL
OUT OF SPACE AND TIME
BEYOND THE WALL OF SLEEP
H.P.LOVECRAFT
NIGHTMARE IN BLACK
CARL JACOBI
NIGHTMARE NEED
NIGHT SCREAMING FEAR
AUGUST

sus had been long awaited.

Publication slowed to a crawl for a time after this, due to production difficulties, but by 1976 things were back to an even keel. And what was more interesting: new, previously unannounced titles, by Ramsey Campbell, Brian Lumley, and L. Sprague deCamp, began to appear. The previously rudderless ship had found its course again, and appeared set for a voyage well beyond the year 1981, which August Derleth had designated for the sale or liquidation of Arkham House. The recent 1977/78 schedule confirms this opinion, with 9 entirely new titles slated for publication. It would seem that the firm is prepared to embark upon another 40 years of providing the finest in fantasy fiction to the reading public. To which I say amen.

During August Derleth's tenure as editor of Arkham House, certain elements in fandom took great relish in dumping on him at every conceivable opportunity; nor did this end with his death. Quite the contrary, the howling over his multitudinous sins grew louder still, seeing as he now lacked a voice with which to answer. Based on what I have seen and heard for myself, I should like to consider the accusations a moment if I may.

First, there was the charge that Derleth made a fortune from Lovecraft. Absolutely false. All earnings from Lovecraft's writings went first to his surviving aunt, and after her death, to Messrs. Derleth and Wandrei, with the stipulation that these monies be devoted to keeping his work in print. Nor was the sum accrued thereby a considerable one, as a quick perusal of Chalker's bibliography will reveal a pitifully small number of books, mostly paperbacks, that appeared prior to 1971. The royalties received from Avon, Lancer and Ballantine put together would hardly support the continuance of Lovecraft in print, much less enhance the income of his publisher. Yet some people still choose to repeat such slanderous rubbish as gospel truth.

And speaking of editions, there was the old saw that a certain number of copies of each Arkham House title were tucked away on publication,[3] to be leaked out sometime after at exorbitant out-of-print prices. Really? Then why has no proof of this surfaced? Certainly Arkham House could not mount so heinous a conspiracy without accomplices. Have none of these wretches been found out? Surely dealers must have been used as middlemen, to bring these books to the open market. Has the watchful eye of fandom not detected these clandestine transactions? Is there no evidence? Not a shred, nor a scrap, nor an atom. Rumors aside, no one has ever proved that Arkham House retains more than one file copy when the shelf stock is gone. Yet some people persist in believing that they receive a cut of the out-of-print prices.

"It would seem that the firm is prepared to embark upon another 40 years of providing the finest in fantasy fiction."

It is a well-known story that when Derleth was in desperate need of funds to pay printing costs, David H. Keller provided the necessary money, without being asked. He gave it with the comment "I pride myself on my judgment of character." If this was the opinion of "Doc" Keller, a man of absolute integrity, a professional psychiatrist and one of the finest men ever to work in the science-fiction field, what right does some craven fan have to question the honesty of August Derleth?

However, there is one point on which I take exception with Mr. Derleth, nothing to do with his conduct as a publisher, but rather his work as an editor,

© 1978 Robert MacIntyre

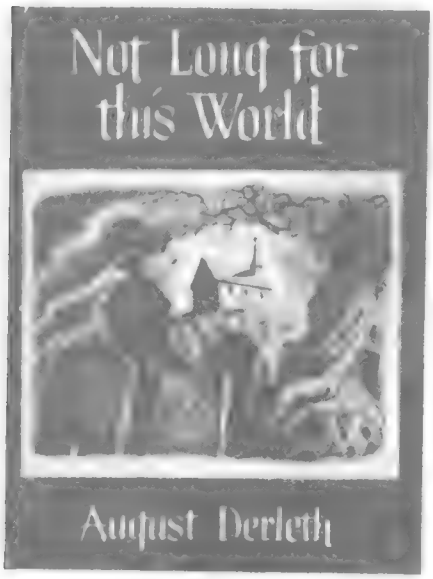
The Great Cthulhu

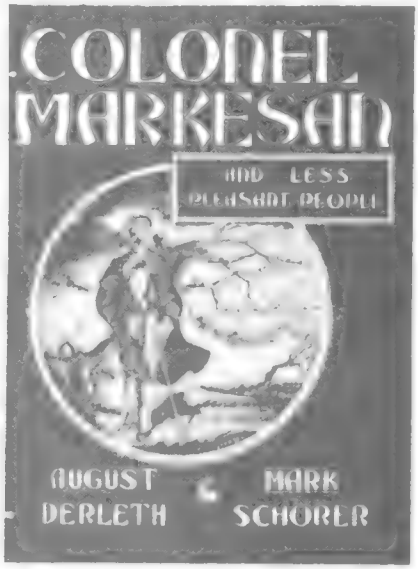
in his interpretation of Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos. The "Old ones," as originally conceived, were cosmic, unmaterial beings, evil in the sense of the threat they posed to our world, but basically amoral, considered on their own terms. Mankind was to them as germs are to us. Just as bacteria are necessary to our digestion, so our dreams provided them with a link to this world. This reflected Lovecraft's mechanistic philosophy of existence, in which chaos was the only natural order, and mankind the plaything of indifferent cosmic forces.

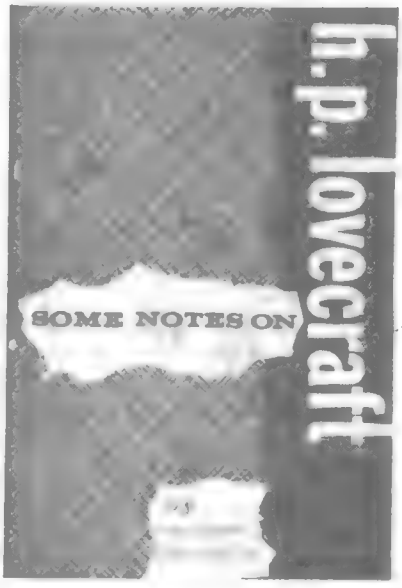
Derleth had a very different view of life,* however, and he imparted to the Lovecraftian mythos, through his sequels and collaborations, a sense of good and evil, a moral order hitherto lacking. The mythos became ethos, the fall repeated for the benefit of *Weird Tales* readers. And he also utilized more traditional notions of magic, assigning different gods to each of the classical elements, air, earth, fire and water. There were even ranks and orders, acolyte to Yog-Sothoth, son of Cthulhu, and so on: a regular Collin de Planty of extraterrestrial deities. In so doing, the originality of Lovecraft's conception was lost, and much of the horror with it. The essence of terror in Lovecraft is alienation, me, all alone, against *them*, whatever they are, *out there*. In Derleth, this becomes Elder Gods vs. Old-Ones, that is, good guys vs. bad guys, and you-know-who always wins. The threat is no longer direct: we are merely spectators in an intergalactic squash tournament, with some hapless sorcerer (serves him right, too) as the ball. Derleth sought to clarify and extend Lovecraft's mythos. Instead, he codified and emasculated it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

"The editor of this publication has requested me to say a few words about myself. I have been a dedicated collector of weird fiction for some years now, and possess in excess of 3000 items, including hard-covers, paperbacks, periodicals and fanzines. This includes a complete set of Arkham House publications, so I know of what I speak. Contrary to the opinions of some, the genre has a well-nigh limitless scope, ranging from horror to ecstasy and all points between. In literary terms, it is much underrated. To conclude, if the readers have any comments, either commendations or complaints, regarding my article, would they kindly forward them to the editor, who will advise me."



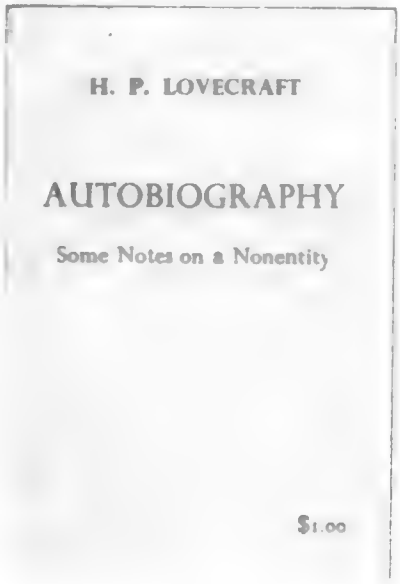


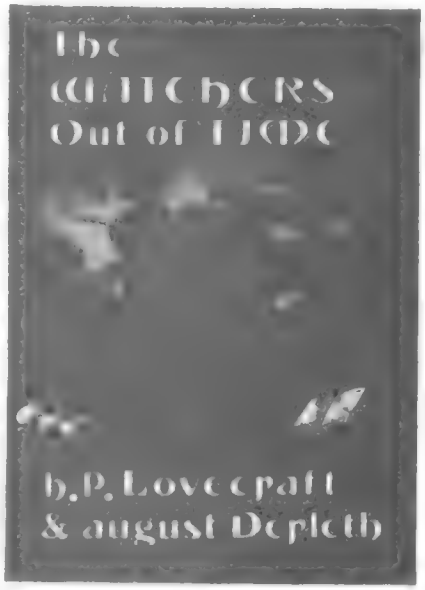


And now to the books themselves. With a few exceptions which I shall discuss in detail later, Arkham House publications have remained remarkably uniform in quality and appearance. From 1939 until 1974, the printer was The Collegiate Press, George Banta Co., of Menasha, Wis. At the demise of this firm, one book, Frank Belknap Long's *Howard Phillips Lovecraft: Dreamer On The Night-Side*, was printed by Edwards Bros., Inc. of Ann Arbor, Mich. The Lakeside Press, R.R. Donnelley & Sons Co., has been used on all subsequent publications. Bindings on all of these have been Holliston Black Novelex,[5] a fine weave cloth with a smooth shiny surface. A joy to the touch, it unfortunately retains and shows fingerprints or any other handling, and runs badly when wet, leaving hideous purple stains. Stamping is invariably gold. The paper used by Banta and Edwards Bros. was Cream Winnebago Eggshell, an attractive stock.[6] Donnelley use #55 Dontext, but, to my way of thinking, not quite as nice. All in all, the Arkham House books are superior productions, and a fine example of what a specialty press can achieve. One would have to look to Don Grant for anything better.

The "exceptional" Arkhams are definitely not up to the above standards. Two books were published jointly with Pellegrini & Cudahy of New York in 1952: Dr. Keller's *Tales From Underwood*, and an anthology, *Night's Yawning Peal*. The former was bound in red-brown cloth, the latter in grey; both poorly. The paper was of low quality, with rough edges. And the printing was inferior, being thin and pale. Derleth was rightly dissatisfied, and the arrangement was quickly terminated. Beginning in 1963, a booklet and two books of poetry were published by Villiers Press of London, England for Arkham House. The first was H.P. Lovecraft's *Autobiography of a Non-Entity*, a bit of ephemera that did not appear in the 1963 stock list, and the latter were Joseph Payne Brennan's *Nightmare Need*, in pink cloth, and Stanley McNail's *Something Breathing*, in green cloth. Apart from the rather bilious bindings, they are solid, competent little books, but nothing more.

The dust jackets adorning Arkham House books feature much original artwork, so I propose to discuss these, and the artists, separately. The first one, prepared for *The Outsider* by Virgil Finlay, was hardly an auspicious beginning. It is a monstrosity in blue, a paste-and-scissors job throwing together a number





of old *Weird Tales* illos in a seething morass of star nymphs and monsters, all under some crudely inked asterisks passing for stars. Could this be the same man who created those marvellous visualizations of A. Merritt in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*? One wonders. I shall be charitable, and dismiss it as juvenilia. Finlay redeemed himself 9 years later, however, with his superb illustrations for Seabury Quinn's *Roads*. They were among his best work, and certainly superior to the story they accompanied. Also noteworthy was his illustration for *The Shunned House*, a beautiful design utilized for the cover of *Marginalia*.

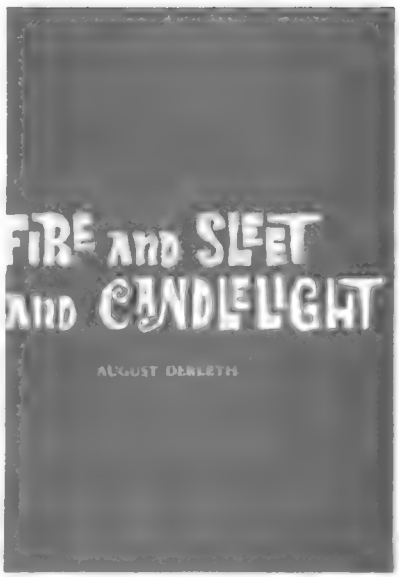
In terms of sheer quantity, Frank Utpatel has prepared the greatest number of dust jackets for Arkham House, 43 to date and one more announced. His work cannot be called great, but he can capture a certain atmosphere, and technically speaking, even the most insipid stuff shows fine craftsmanship. Utpatel's best is really quite good, as in *The Travelling Grave, Nine Horrors & A Dream, Carnacki The Ghost-Finder,* and particularly Lovecraft's *Collected Poems*. His forte seems to be sinister landscapes and vistas, though in the first mentioned title he creates a suitably uncanny street scene, and in the illustrations to the last, an impressive gallery of demons, witches, werewolves, etc., seemingly drawn from Symbolist imagery. Utpatel is odd in that he is so inconsistent. Like the little girl with the curl, when he is good, he is really very good, and when he is not, let's just say he leaves me cold. Unfortunately, he seems more inclined to the latter in recent years.

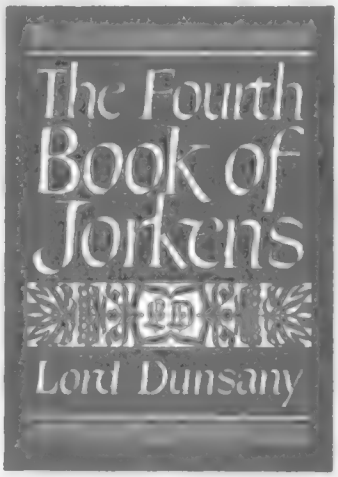
> *"In terms of sheer quantity, Frank Utpatel has prepared the greatest number of dust jackets for Arkham House, 43 to date..."*

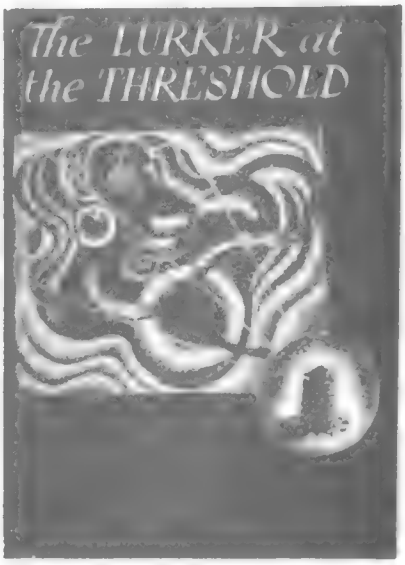
A number of artists produced only a handful of works for Arkham House, but some of these were quite superior. The near-legendary Hannes Bok did the finest study of *The Hounds Of Tindalos* yet, as the jacket illustration for the book of the same name. And his full color painting for Howard's *Skull-Face* is visually stunning, though completely out of character with the book. Bok's other jackets are rather disappointing, *Out Of Space &Time* leaving no solid impression, and *The House On The Borderland* having the appearance of an unfinished sketch. Lee Brown Coye's uniquely gruesome grotesques adorn 8 Arkham House titles, including the three permanent Lovecraft editions. His illustrations to Lovecraft's *3 Tales Of Horror* are quite excellent, capturing his rustic macabre exactly. The same applies to the jacket for Manly Wade Wellman's *Who Fears The Devil?* It has been said

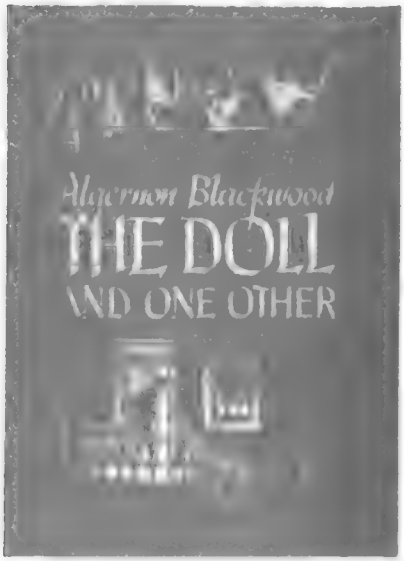
Ronald Clyne, happily quite a different story. He started out with them as a lad with promise, and he went on to more than fulfill it. Clyne's earliest work, for *Something Near* and *The Opener Of The Way*, was crude, but he quickly found his stride in *Witch House* and *The Lurker At The Threshold*. In time he moved away from illustrations to basic calligraphy and framing patterns for the design. Before doing so, however, he produced some superb examples of the former in *Fearful Pleasures, The Clock Strikes Twelve, The Doll & One Other,* and *This Mortal Coil*. The jackets of *Something About Cats, The Throne Of Saturn*, and the wrapper of the *Arkham Sampler* are typical of his mature work, which won him commissions from major New York publishers. Clyne's most recent work has been almost austere in its simplicity, as in *The Green Round* and *The Folsom Flint*. A truly impressive development in one without any format training in art.

"The essence of terror in Lovecraft is alienation, me, all alone, against them *whatever they are,* out there."

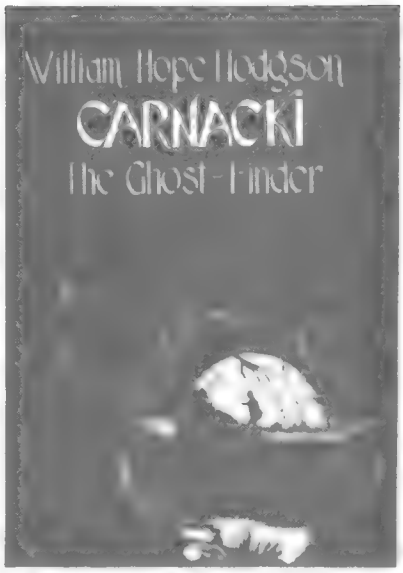






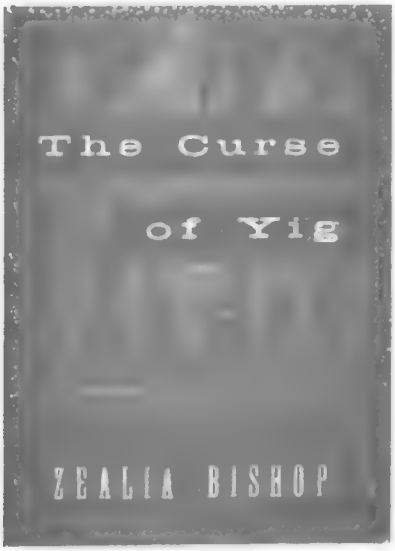


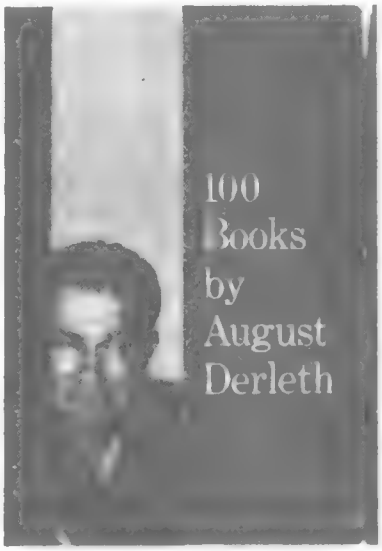
that Derleth "rediscovered" Coye in the early sixties, after years of obscurity. Not quite. He had been plugging away in the Ziff-Davis mags, in addition to working in metal and wood, and writing a column for a local newspaper. Coye is one of those artists who is always around somewhere, scaring hell out of you. On quite a different note, the popular *New Yorker* cartoonist, R(ichard) Taylor, did 5 very nice jackets in the late fifties and early sixties. *The Shuttered Room* is particularly fine, and *The Horror From The Hills* depicts an alienating alien indeed. Actually, now that I reflect upon it, they were all first-rate. Taylor's work as a macabre illustrator scores 5 out of 5; quite an unexpected talent from a man whose *Fractured French* had me in stitches. His cartoon style is somewhat reminiscent of Osbert Lancaster, but the Arkham dust jackets are quite singular, in conception and execution.



hardly "one-offs", perhaps more along the lines of "things to come." Tim Kirk did fine work for *Nameless Places, Literary Swordsman & Sorcerers,* and *Dreams From R'Lyeh*; in the latter case, notably superior to the book itself. The first named is a particularly fine study in blue. Stephen Fabian has produced outstanding jackets for Lumley's *The Horror At Oakdeene* (hopefully putting an end to Herb Arnold's stuff), and Marjorie Bowen's *Kecksies*, thus far. I trust we may expect many more from him in future.

That concludes my brief and personal assessment of the firm's history and publications. Once the books went out-of-print, they left the Arkham House domain and entered the wild and woolly antiquarian book market, classification modern American lit,





Utpatel tried to emulate them in *The Dark Brotherhood*, for consistency's sake, and made an utter botch of it.

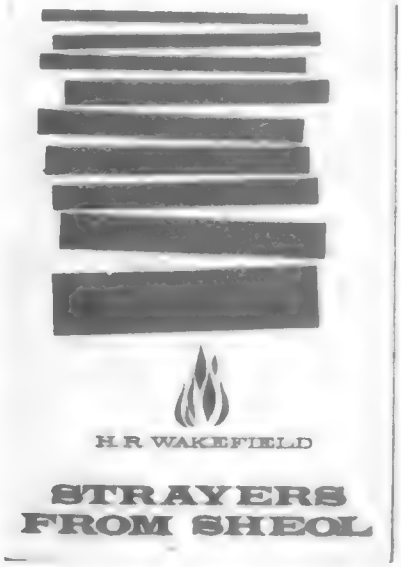
Finally, I should comment on some "one-offs" of interest. Burt Trimpey produced a very effective dust jacket for *Beyond The Wall Of Sleep*, using photographs of Clark Ashton Smith's sculptures, in a hazy red tint, emerging from a black background. Smith's primitive style is reminiscent of primeval deities, like the monoliths of Easter Island, on a miniature scale. The suggestion of elder gods in darkness is quite atmospheric. A similar effect was achieved by George Barrows, using masks and surreal photographic effects, for Ray Bradbury's *Dark Carnival*. Frank Wakefield created some arresting amphibious horrors for *Jumbee* and *Genius Loci*. And then, of course, there are the younger artists whose work has just begun to appear on Arkham House jackets,

low class. Fans soon lost control of the prices, and the going-rate for the earlier titles began to soar. By 1945, people were willing to pay $25 for a fine copy of *The Outsider*; no small potatoes, in those days. Lovecraft was being recognized as a major figure, and his works in particular became much-sought collector's items. In the horror boom of the late 50's, *The Outsider* passed the $100 mark, but other authors lagged far behind in popularity and demand. Smith was sought only in California, as a regional author, and Howard's rise was not to begin until the Conan paperback series commenced in 1967. Shortly thereafter, in 1968, *Rosemary's Baby* heralded the beginning of the next horror boom, greater than any previous, and an unprecedented demand for quality weird fiction started. Arkham House books acquired a mystique, being at once finely produced, limited edition

collectibles, and the repository of the best American weird fiction to be written in this century. That may not entirely be the truth, but it is the legend. In the 70's, prices went right through the roof.

Which brings me to the concluding portion of my article. Prices on Arkham House books have been running hog-wild for nearly four years now, certainly since Stuart Schiff's "The Jewels of Arkham" went out of date. My editor believes there ought to be a revised, updated price guide available, and I know I'm the one to do it. But first, I want to lay down clear ground rules for the data and its use. This is just going to be a *guide*; I'm not bringing the tablets down from the mountain top. It should be used with a leavening of common sense, and a realization that in the final analysis, what a book is worth is what you're willing to pay for it. The prices listed have been assembled over a period of a year, from various dealers' catalogues and private ads. These were asking prices, not selling, but I've averaged them and applied a bit of common sense based on experience. The condition in all cases was fine in dust wrapper. By that I mean no major signs of wear to the boards or spine, no rips or tears in the cloth, no water-staining or warping; the cloth is shiny, the pages bright and clean, and the binding tight. The dust wrapper may be slightly worn at the edges, but no tattering and certainly no tears. And no fading of the spine. Those are my standards and they are rigid. Arkham House books are by no means scarce, and the intelligent collector has a right to expect optimum condition. If he is getting less, he should pay less. But on the other hand, a dealer has every right to charge a premium on mint or near-mint copies. Which brings to mind another point. The collector must not expect to receive these listed prices from dealers should he decide to sell his books. They only apply between dealer and collector, or collector and collector. A dealer will probably pay 25 to 40% of the eventual selling price. Maybe 50% if it is an exceptionally fine item, or he has a ready buyer. But, being a businessman, he has to make a profit, is accustomed as most of us are to regular meals and a comfortable home. If the collector can get more, very well, but he must not expect it. And regarding the applicability of these prices, there are geographic considerations. In California, Arkham House books are in great demand, and very expensive. In the Mid-West and Canada, this is less so. Also, specialist dealers will more readily acknowledge

the value of these books than non-specialist dealers, or those whose specialty is in another field. A dealer in incunabula will find Arkham House publications somewhat Mickey Mouse. Finally, a word on locating these books, if you do not have a local science fiction/fantasy specialist. In-print titles can be obtained from *Arkham House/Mycroft & Moran*, Book Publishers, Sauk City, WI. 53583. For out-of-print titles, there are two possibilities: If you don't mind doing your own hunting: Subscribe to *Xenophile*, P.O. Box 9660, St. Louis, MO. 93122, you'll always find plenty of 'em in it; however, for those who prefer to work through a dealer, I would recommend *L.W. Currey Rare Books Inc.*, Elizabeth, N.Y. 12932. I don't agree with all his prices, but he is honest, reliable and his descriptions are accurate. ■



A PRICE GUIDE TO ARKHAM HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

All of the following are considered to be fine in dust wrapper, as previously defined. Only books out of print as of May 1, 1978 are listed. Prices are current as of October 1, 1978.

The Outsider and Others by H. P. Lovecraft $350
Someone In the Dark by August Derleth[1] $100
Out of Space and Time by Clark Ashton Smith $200
Beyond the Wall of Sleep by H. P. Lovecraft $275
The Eye and the Finger by Donald Wandrei $85
Jumbee and Other Uncanny Tales by Henry S. Whitehead $95
Lost Worlds by Clark Ashton Smith $150
Marginalia by H. P. Lovecraft $95
Something Near by August Derleth $75
The Opener of the Way by Robert Bloch $75
Witch House by Evangeline Walton $25
Green Tea and Other Ghost Stories by J. S. LeFanu $85
The Lurker At the Threshold by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth $60
The Hounds of Tindalos by Frank Belknap Long $50
The Doll and One Other by Algernon Blackwood $15
The House On the Borderland and Other Novels by William Hope Hodgson $125
Skull-Face and Others by Robert E. Howard $200
West India Lights by Henry S. Whitehead $30
Fearful Pleasures by A. E. Coppard $30
The Clock Strikes 12 by H. R. Wakefield $20
Slan by A. E. Van Vogt $65
This Mortal Coil by Cynthia Asquith $20
Dark of the Moon edited by August Derleth[2] $50
Dark Carnival by Ray Bradbury $100
Revelations In Black by Carl Jacobi $30
Night's Black Agents by Fritz Leiber, Jr. $50
The Travelling Grave and Other Stories by L. P. Hartley $25
The Web of Easter Island by Donald Wandrei $25
The Fourth Book of Jorkens by Lord Dunsany $25
Roads by Seabury Quinn $50
Genius Loci and Other Tales by Clark Ashton Smith $40
Not Long For This World by August Derleth $35
Something About Cats and Other Pieces by H. P. Lovecraft $60
The Throne of Saturn by S. Fowler Wright $20
A Hornbook For Witches by Leah Bodine Drake $350
The Dark Chateau by Clark Ashton Smith $150
Tales From Underwood by David H. Keller $30
Night's Yawning Peal edited by August Derleth $30
The Curse of Yig by Zealia B. Bishop $40
The Feasting Dead by John Metcalfe $30
The Survivor and Others by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth $45
Always Comes Evening by Robert E. Howard $250
Spells and Philtres by Clark Ashton Smith $150
The Mask of Cthulhu by August Derleth $35
Nine Horrors and a Dream by Joseph Payne Brennan $30
Arkham House: The First 20 Years by August Derleth (wraps) $30
Some Notes On H. P. Lovecraft by August Derleth (wraps) $30
The Shuttered Room and Other Pieces by H. P. Lovecraft and Divers Hands $40
The Abominations of Yondo by Clark Ashton Smith $35
Pleasant Dreams by Robert Bloch $20
Invaders From the Dark by Greye La Spina $15
Strayers From Sheol by H. R. Wakefield $15
Fire, Sleet and Candlelight edited by August Derleth $20
The Shunned House by H. P. Lovecraft[3] $500
Dreams and Fancies by H. P. Lovecraft $40
Lonesome Places by August Derleth $25
Dark Mind, Dark Heart edited by August Derleth $20
100 Books by August Derleth[4] (wraps) $25
The Trail of Cthulhu by August Derleth $25
The Dunwich Horror and Others by H. P. Lovecraft (1st printing)[5] $25
Collected Poems by H. P. Lovecraft $35
Who Fears the Devil? by Manly Wade Wellman $25
The Dark Man and Others by Robert E. Howard $55
The Horror From the Hills by Frank Belknap Long $15
Autobiography of a Non-Entity by H. P. Lovecraft (wraps) $30
The Inhabitant of the Lake and Less Welcome Tenants by J. Ramsey Campbell $20
Poems For Midnight by Donald Wandrei $35
Over the Edge edited by August Derleth $15
At the Mountains of Madness and Other Novels by H. P. Lovecraft (1st printing)[6] $20
Portraits In Moonlight by Carl Jacobi $15
Tales of Science and Sorcery by Clark Ashton Smith $25
Nightmare Need by Joseph Payne Brennan $45
Selected Letters I by H. P. Lovecraft $30

Poems In Prose by Clark Ashton Smith $60
Dagon and Other Macabre Tales by H. P. Lovecraft (1st printing)[7] $20
Something Breathing by Stanley McNail $45
The Quick and the Dead by Vincent Starrett $25
Strange Harvest by Donald Wandrei $20
The Dark Brotherhood and Other Pieces by H. P. Lovecraft and Divers Hands $35
Colonel Markesan and Less Pleasant People by August Derleth and Mark Schorer $10
Black Medicine by Arthur J. Burks $15
Deep Waters by William Hope Hodgson $20
Travellers By Night edited by August Derleth $15
The Mind Parasites by Colin Wilson $15
3 Tales of Horror by H. P. Lovecraft $20
Strange Gateways by E. Hoffmann Price $20
The Green Round by Arthur Machen $10
Selected Letters II by H. P. Lovecraft $25
Nightmares and Daydreams by Nelson Bond $10
Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos by H. P. Lovecraft and others $15
The Folsom Flint and Other Curious Tales by David H. Keller $10
30 Years of Arkham House by August Derleth $15
Demons and Dinosaurs by L. Sprague deCamp $75
Other Dimensions by Clark Ashton Smith $20
Dark Things edited by August Derleth $15
Selected Poems by Clark Ashton Smith $20

Herewith are the Mycroft and Moran titles now out-of-print:

"In Re: Sherlock Holmes" by August Derleth $40
Carnacki the Ghost-Finder by William Hope Hodgson $35
The Memoirs of Solar Pons by August Derleth $75
3 Problems For Solar Pons by August Derleth $100
The Return of Solar Pons by August Derleth $35
The Reminiscences of Solar Pons by August Derleth $30
The Phantom-Fighter by Seabury Quinn $20
A Praed Street Dossier by August Derleth $20
The Exploits of the Chevalier Dupin by Michael Harrison $15
Wisconsin Murders by August Derleth $10
The Adventure of the Unique Dickensians by August Derleth (wraps)[8] $15
Mr. Fairlie's Final Journey by August Derleth $15
Number 7, Queer Street by Margery Lawrence $20
The Casebook of Solar Pons by August Derleth $25

and periodicals:

The Arkham Sampler per issue (8 in all) $10
Set $100
The Arkham Collector per issue (10 in all) $3
Bound set $40

FOOTNOTES FOR PRICE GUIDE

1. A variant pirate edition of some 200 copies exists, which was bought up by August Derleth. These measure 1.8 cm. across the sheets, with a page height of 17.6 cm., slightly larger than the 1st edition. Though scarcer, it traditionally sells for approximately 75% of the list price.
2. A later dust wrapper was issued on glossy paper, with lettering by Gary Gore. This takes about 10% off the list price.
3. Originally printed by W. Paul Cook in 1928, the loose signatures were bound into 100 copies in 1961. Most, but not all, bear an Arkham House cancel copyright notice on the reverse of the title page. No dust wrapper was issued.
4. A small number of these were bound in boards, and fetch roughly twice the list price.
5. 9,123 copies printed in 1963. $5.00 price on front dust wrapper flap, no head bands on spine.
6. 6,539 copies printed in 1964, issued with green dust wrapper.
7. 5,459 copies printed in 1965, colophon notes 5,500 copies.
8. Gerry de la Ree bound a few of these, and they fetch roughly twice the list price.

A final note on autographs. How much these will add to the value of a book is determined mainly by three things. First, whether or not an author's signatures are common. Derleth's and Bradbury's are very much so, Bloch's, Leiber's and Long's reasonably so. Quinn's, Keller's, Starrett's are rarely seen, and Smith's also. Metcalfe's and Wakefield's are very uncommon, and Asquith's and Dunsany's virtually unheard of. A common signature adds only about 15%, *unless*, and this brings me to the second point, it is a personal inscription of some historic interest, a presentation copy from one major author to another, for example. My third point is that the signature inscription ought to be on the actual paper of the book itself. Gummed labels or tipped-in letters and such are not quite the same thing, unless, in the latter case, important correspondence is involved. Just what premium would apply to such items is a matter that would have to be determined by the seller.

FOOTNOTES FOR ARTICLE

1. Publishers have traditionally been averse to short story collections, as these are notoriously poor sellers. Unlike novels, they provide too many opportunities to put the book down. No new collection of weird fiction appeared in America between *Lukundoo* (1927) and *Fantastic Memories* (1945), from a mainstream house, that is.
2. Shroud Publications, like the vampire, has risen from the grave, preserving its shoddy standards intact.
3. Another version of this claimed that more copies were published than were designated in the print run.
4. He came from a Catholic background, and possessed a well-developed moral sense. Unlike Lovecraft, Derleth was a family man, and I believe a happy man as well. A good life may have taken some of the kick out of his weird fiction, but what's more important, anyhow?
5. In two earlier books, *The Outsider* and *Jumbee*, this seemed a slightly bluish tint.
6. Just an afterthought. The grey endpapers came into use in 1958, commencing with *Nine Horrors and a Dream*.

A GUIDE TO COLLECTING FUNK COMICS

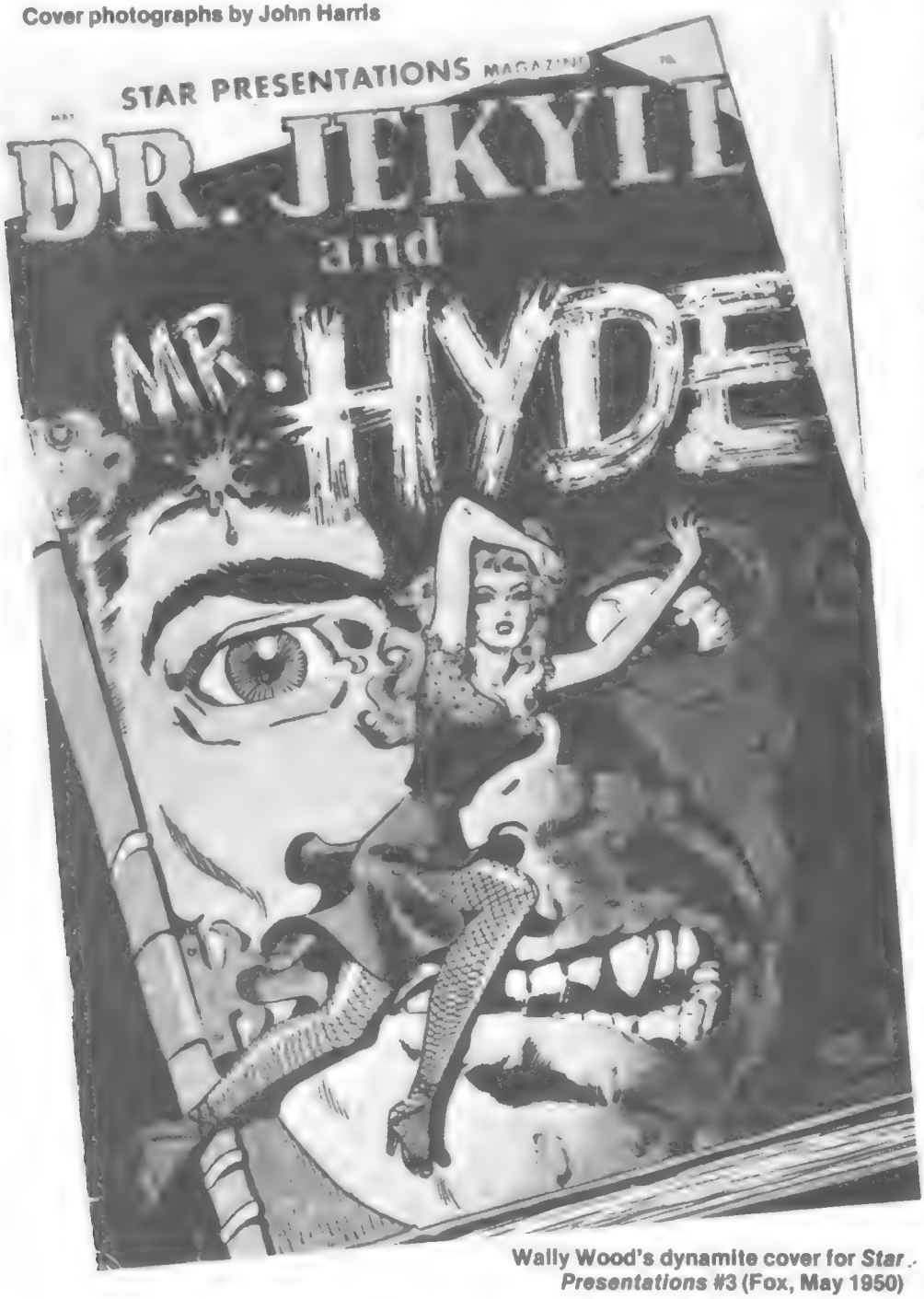
WHEN HEROES STOPPED SELLING COMIC BOOKS IN THE MID-1940S, COMIC BOOK PUBLISHERS BEGAN LOOKING FOR OTHER KINDS OF STORIES TO ATTRACT READERS.

BY JOHN WOOLEY

Illustration © 1978 Jim Craig

Naturally, they—or at least the less scrupulous of them—turned to the twin threats of sex and violence, which have historically been good box office since Adam and Eve. John Wooley takes us on a fascinating tour of the books from one of comics' more lurid genres in this article.

Cover photographs by John Harris



Wally Wood's dynamite cover for *Star Presentations* #3 (Fox, May 1950)

IF AS MANY COMIC BOOK HISTORIANS CONTEND, THE PERIOD FROM 1938 TO 1946 constitutes the Golden Age, and 1956 began the Silver Age, then the years from 1946 to 1955 will undoubtedly have to be labeled the Age of Funk. Never, before or since, have so many comics appeared bearing one of more of the following traits: outrageousness, silliness (usually unintentional), poor quality (in both art and writing), bizarreness, exploitativeness, and a single-minded emphasis on sex and/or gore. The so-called "Good Girl Art" and "Esoteric" comics fall under this heading, as do most of the cheapo horror and crime comics that are being collected nowadays with increasing frequency and fervour.

This piece, then, is intended as a guide to the reader wishing to know more about the Funk Age product. And, if I seem rather flippant about my subject from time to time, I beg your indulgence. It's difficult to be completely serious and scholarly about something that was never very serious or scholarly to begin with.

Some Guidelines

(1) It's important to remember that *funk* is a value judgment, and varies from collector to collector. In certain circles, for instance, *Reefer Madness*, that 1938 exploitation film about the evils of pot smoking, is taken quite seriously, even literally. However, on most college campuses, a showing of the film elicits bleary-eyed giggles, guffaws, and hoots of ridicule.

(2) When *Batman* (the TV series) was first aired, it was lapped up like the proverbial sno-cone in Hell. Some research suggested that the viewing audience consisted of at least two distinct groups: One group was made up of children, who watched the show as a more-or-less straight adventure piece; the other group gathered around TV sets in college dorms and fraternity houses, and laughed themselves to death over Batman's silliness.

There are other examples, but these two should serve. What I'm saying here is this: One man's funk is another man's symbolic reality. Or: Funk, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

A Disclaimer

The comics to be covered here are the ones that I, after 12+ years of collecting, believe to be funky. This is definitely a value judgment on my part (see guidline #1 above), and as such, is almost completely subjective. However, many of the titles I'm going to talk about have been mentioned elsewhere as fitting into a funk category, so I'm not entirely setting my own rules. Keep in mind that there are those who think, say, *Richie Rich* comics are the greatest things to come down the pike since pimento cheese. But Mr. Rich's adventures tend to drop from my hands after a few moments' inspection; therefore, he —and others of his ilk—will not be found in these pages.

What *is* included here may be considered roughly to define the boundaries of funk. Certainly, most, if not all, of the comics I am going to describe deserve a place in a representative Funk Age collection. I hope that this article will be of assistance in forming guidelines, so that the person interested in collecting funk can find a jumping-off place for his own explorations in the field.

Companies of the Funk Age

Fox Feature Syndicate

The story goes something like this: Victor Fox, who ran a tame, fairly successful comic book company, was called into the service of his country during World War II. While he was away, the line

of comics was entrusted to friends. They managed to run it into the ground in about three weeks. After Fox had done his bit towards defeating the Axis, he returned home to take over his former publishing house, only to find it in ruins. Most of his titles were gone, literally mismanaged to death. Blue Beetle was the only remaining viable character.

It must have been tempting to just say the Hell with it, at that point; but Fox didn't. Instead, in one of those epiphanous moments we've all heard about, he elected to continue, to put the company back on its feet. He began to revamp the line, adding new titles and spicing everything up with liberal doses of sex and violence, comic book style.

The best place to see the results of Fox's new policy is on the covers of *Blue Beetle* comics, one of the few titles held over from his pre-war group. As late as 1945, Fox Feature Syndicate was publishing innocuous, child-pleasing covers like the one reproduced in this article from *Blue Beetle* #39. However, by 1948, things had definitely changed as can be seen from the reproduction of the cover of *Blue Beetle* #54. Innocuous it wasn't—child-pleasing it may have been, but for different reasons from its predecessor. The once-dominant figure of Dan Garrett's alter-ego has been reduced to a tiny head in a circle, located just down and to the left of a scantily-clad girl's ample buttock. BB's rueful look seems to be saying, sorry kids, but what can you do?

Fox quickly rebuilt his line. *Rocket Kelly, Green Mask,* and *Samson,* were supplanted by *Crimes by Women, Hunted, Western Killers,* and *Phantom Lady.* Most of these, especially *Phantom Lady* and the jungle titles like *Rulah,* dwelt upon what Fredric Wertham called in his infamous, funk-killing book, *Seduction of the Innocent,* "headlights" (large, prominently displayed women's breasts). The butts weren't bad either.

The thing to remember here is that most of Fox's comics were pure trash. There were exceptions, which we'll deal with shortly, but generally both art and story were on such a low level as to be almost nonexistent. Artist Howard Nostrand, who was working during those years, has said that it was Fox's policy to hire kids fresh out of art school, promise them ridiculously low sums of money for comic art, and then renege on payment after the art was run. A glance through any of Fox's lesser titles—the love and western titles, for instance—goes a long way toward substantiating Nostrand's statement. Quite a bit of the art is frankly awful: Poorly drawn characters frequently squeezed out of panels by huge, badly lettered word balloons; lots of profile shots of faces, with no background detail; plenty of abysmal silhouettes. Some Fox comics are even missing the first page of the first story. It was Fox's policy to print the first page of a lead story on the inside front cover of the magazine, a practice that worked fine until an advertiser wanted space in the issue at the last minute. When this situation arose, Victor Fox, the *ne plus ultra* of exploitationists, would simply pull the first page of the story and run the ad instead. (This is according to Wilt Conine, an honest and consistent dealer and friend who has supplied me with many of my Fox titles.)

Avon's *Witchcraft* #5 (Dec.-Jan. 1952-53), featuring a Frank Kelly Freas cover.

There were some exceptions to Fox's grind-'em-out-cheap policy. For most of his titles, he could be counted on to have covers which, if not good, were at least eye-catching. As long as there was a girl on the cover with some skin showing, and she was either (a) in immediate peril or (b) sticking a gun in someone's face, the criteria were met.

The company saved its best chops for a few of the titles. The jungle efforts (*Rulah, Zago, Zegra, Zoot,* and *Jo-Jo*) are usually okay in the art department, though the stories are pretty lame; while *Phantom Lady, Blue Beetle,* and *All-Top* are consistently good.

Since much of Fox's art, especially in the second-string books, was at best uninspired, and at worst not much more than a series of crudely drawn lines meant to represent human beings, there were not a great many memorable artists to come out of the company. However, a few did emerge, some of them creating

COLLECTOR'S DREAM CLASSIFIED

Collector's Dream Classified is a bargain way to advertise for your wants or books you have for sale. Advertise every issue. Sell those doubles and books you're tired of and use the money to buy the stuff you still need. Fill in those holes in your collection.

Your low-cost ad will be read by thousands of eager buyers and sellers.

All ads received are typeset. Please print or type all ad information. No minimum or maximum wordage.

New Rates are 10¢ per word. One-letter words such as I, and middle name initials should *not* be counted in your word count.

Remember to include your name and address in your word count. Post Office box and rural route numbers count as 2 words. Telephone numbers count as 1 word.

Send payment with ad payable to: **G & T Enterprises, P.O. Box 127, Stn. T, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6B 3Z9.**

BUY-SELL-TRADE

Buying: Whole Marvel sets: SPIDER-MAN, IRON MAN, X-MEN, etc. Guide prices paid for strictly graded sets. Tony Vogrin, 1B-8907 112 St., Edmonton, Alta. T6G 2B5.

Buying: COLLECTOR'S DREAM #1, RAMPAGING HULK #1-9, SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #1-25. Send reply by Air Mail. Lars-Erik Vesterlund, Repslagaregatan 2, S-671 00 Ngkoping, Sweden.

For Sale: 40 Classics Comics from early to mid-50s and some 60s Marvels. Send SASE to: Doug Wekony, 59 Lakeview Ave., Lynbrook, NY 11563.

For Sale: Sample MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE, a TV fanzine including two short stories, Lee Meriwether interview, criticism, and art: $1.00. Stephen Borer, 2135 Iglehart, St. Paul, MN 55104.

Buying: All Marvels. Send list with prices. Also send a stamp for our selling list. DeMarie's Comics, 8439 N. 47th Drive, Glendale, AZ 85302.

For Sale: To help finance my trip to RiverCon this year, I am offering the following comics from my collection to the highest bidder: ALL STAR COMICS #8, PLASTIC MAN #5, PLANET COMICS #38, 34, 50, WONDER WOMAN #1, and CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED #1, 3, 4, 5. They are all in good to very good condition, except the cover for Wonder Woman is detached and has a tear in the back cover. I will consider a lot or an individual bid (s). Ralph Stephen Harding, P.O. Box 505, Shoals, IN 47581.

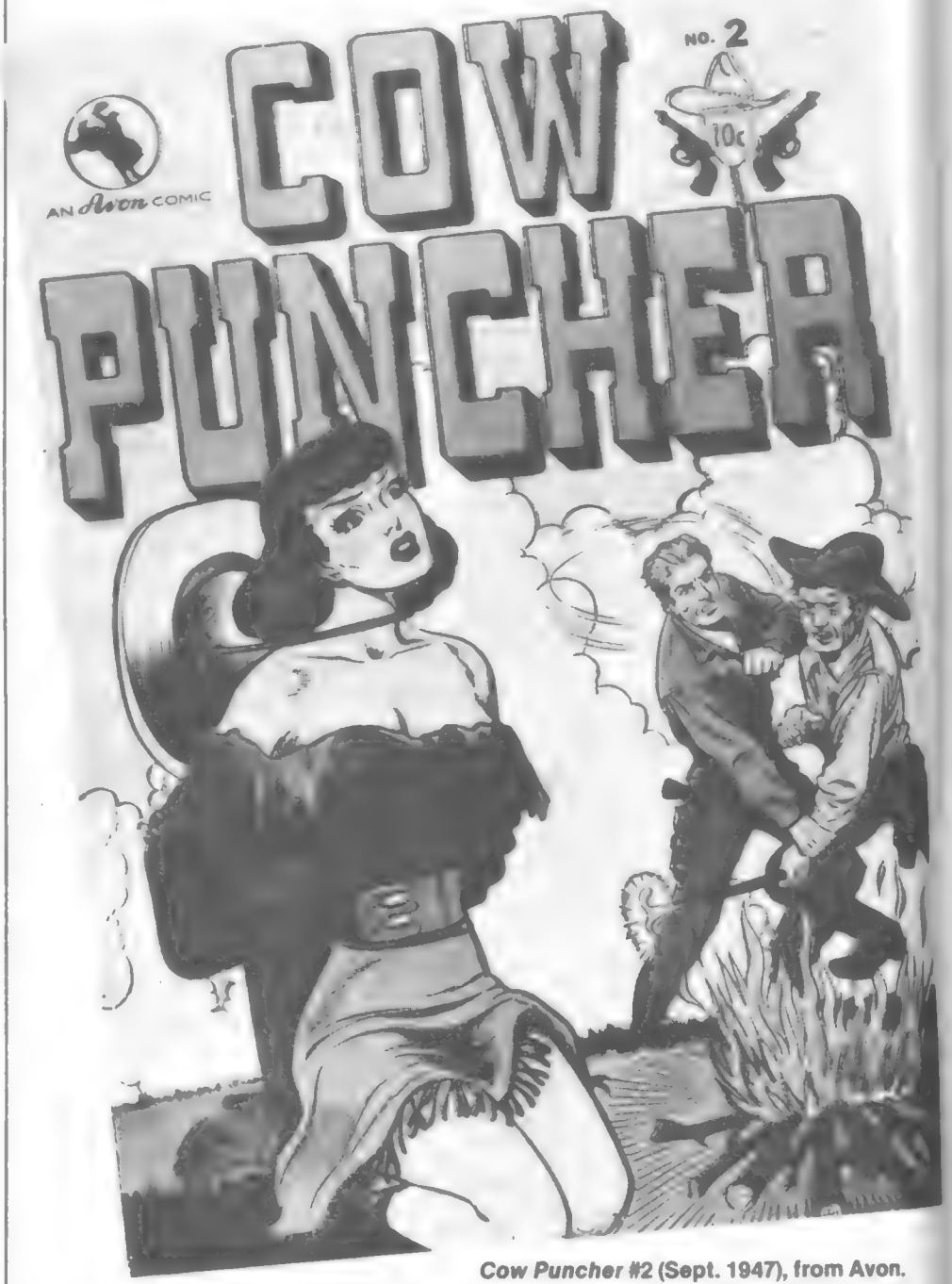
Buying: In MINT condition: DETECTIVE #225, $100, ADVENTURE #247, $75, ACTION #252, $60. Fred Knorr, 4416 Gila Ave., San Diego, CA 92117. (714) 274-4225.

For Sale: "COMIC COLLECTORS do IT every TUESDAY and THURSDAY" bumper stickers. Two dollars each. Lawrence Loftin, P.O. Box 1147, Monroe, LA 71201.

work that was, if not exceptional, at least interesting.

Gregory Page was the name signed to Fox's *Phantom Lady* stories. This name, of course, was a pseudonym, something Fox did frequently in the continuing character magazines. This eccentricity also characterized Fox's rival outfit, Fiction House, who *nom de plumed* virtually their entire 1940's output. Much of the output from both houses was done by the iger shop, and several artists have been mentioned as the "real" *Phantom Lady* artist. The smart money seems to be on Matt Baker, but it's possible that it was Charles Cuidera, a talented illustrator who drew *Blackhawk* for Quality Comics in the mid-1940's.

Let's assume then, that Baker was the man responsible for *Phantom Lady*. We can then go on to say that he was, unequivocally, excellent. Just about the finest rendering of the female form ever to grace the pages of the comics can be found between the covers of any of the ten issues of *Phantom Lady*. Sandra Knight's alter-ego wore a costume designed to titillate the reader by showing vast expanses of flesh, and the contortions that the artist put her through made more than one young male reader wake up in the middle of the night with sweaty palms. Phantom Lady/Sandra Knight ran, jumped, swung tennis rackets, hit people; the artist rendered each action so as to reveal the brevity of her



***Cow Puncher* #2 (Sept. 1947), from Avon. Cover by Jack Kamen. (Note the branding iron!)**

The girls go at it on a typical *Crimes By Women* cover (Fox, #6, Apr. 1949). Note the exposed bra on the blonde.

Blue Beetle **covers, before (right) and after (left) Victor Fox's sex and violence revamping went into effect, (#39, Fall 1945, and #54, March 1948)**

costume and the idea that there was nothing much under it. When she wasn't fighting crime, PL was trying on lingerie or changing clothes, two things that she did quite often. When all else failed, Baker would resort to bondage in order to display his heroine's form.

It's great stuff. No collector of knockout comic art should be without an example of *Phantom Lady*. Unfortunately, these books have gotten to the point of commanding very high prices; an attractive alternative lies in picking up either IW's *Great Action* #8, which reprints *Phantom Lady* #15 with a different cover and no title page, or Super's *Daring Adventures* #12, which does the same thing for *Phantom Lady* #14. (And while we're on the subject of reprints, I would advise the reader to stay away at all costs from any issue of the Ajax *Phantom Lady*. These pitiful post-Comics Code efforts featured stories redrawn and touched-up from the originals, closing up Phantom Lady's neckline, changing her foxy little shorts to knee-length bermudas, and reducing her bra cup size by about four letters.)

On another level, or plane, or whatever, is the work of a man (presumably) named Carter. Carter's art can be found mainly in the Fox crime titles, such as *Murder Incorporated* and *Crimes by Women*, and is distinguished by two things. First, all of his characters are ugly. Every one of them. His women are bad enough, but his men look like they crawled out of some dingy pool hall after spending all day perfecting imitations of Jack Palance.

Second, his characters sweat. Big drops. Buckets. When Carter really gets into sweat, really into it, he can't let three panels go by without making some character perspire. I have comics in which there is so much sweating going on that the page seems drenched with it; however, I have also run up against some Carter stories in which *none* of the characters sweat. We can only imagine that, at times, some inker or editor or colorist decided enough was enough and decided to do the story with no sweat, as it were. Anyway, if you want to have a representative Carter story in your collection, be sure to find one in which the droplets are flying, and the more the better. It's an essential part of his style.

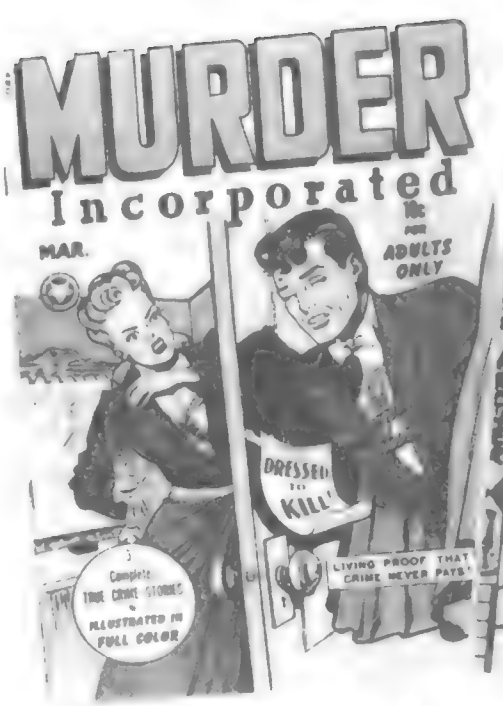
Dick Rockwell didn't show up very often in the Fox titles, or anywhere else that I know of, but his art was unusual enough to note in passing. When he was good, he was fairly flashy, cramming lots of people and things into a panel. His was a sharp, angular kind of style, with very little roundness to the figures, which tended to make all his females look like Marlene Dietrich. There are echoes of better artists like Noel Sickles in his work; but Rockwell's drawing shows a marked tendency to peter out about halfway through a story, as if he had been working under an initial burst of enthusiasm that cooled as he went. You can find his stuff in a few issues of *Women Outlaws*.

One artist who stopped in at Fox while on his way to bigger things was Sam

Glanzman. Certainly, his rough, rather primitive work is not for everyone, but there is an undeniable vitality that sweeps into almost everything he did (or does). As far as I know, he was confined to the western titles during his tenure at Fox—his work appears in several issues of *Western Thrillers*.

Besides the abovementioned artists, several men who later went on to glory at E.C. worked for Fox during their early days. Most prominent among this group was the always-solid Wally Wood, who seems to have worked everywhere at one time or another. Fox used him a lot in their crime titles: *Crimes by Women, Inside Crime, March of Crime,* and *Martin Kane, Private Eye,* for example. His budding way with women and violent action served him well in these titles. It is rough-hewn Wood, and it looks frequently like the inking was done by someone else. The best of his Fox art was done for *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* an adaptation of the Stevenson classic for *Star Presentations* magazine. This is an imaginative piece of work, with Wood doing not only all of the story but a filler at the end entitled "The Repulsive Dwarf." On top of the whole thing is the beautiful cover, also by Wood, which is reprinted in these pages.

Not far behind Wallace Wood was Jack Kamen, who later became famous for his E.C. work featuring beautiful women. For Fox, Kamen rendered some terrific covers, mostly on the jungle titles like *Zoot.* These covers invariably featured the heroine—usually Rulah—in imminent danger from animals (cobras, octopi, leopards, panthers) or small black natives, and preferably both. When the girls began to take over the *Blue Beetle* covers, along about issue #47, Kamen was called in to supply the pulchritude, a task that he accomplished with obvious relish. Occasionally, Kamen would also do an interior story that nicely foreshadowed his later work at E.C.



Fox's *Murder Incorporated* #2 (March 1948). Note the "Adults Only" tag on the cover.

Al Feldstein's cover for Fox's *Meet Corliss Archer* #1 (March 1948)

Another E.C. artist who did work for Fox was Johnny Craig, who rendered the lead story in *Western True Crime* #4, an opus entitled "Quantrill, the Killer's Killer." He was a long way from his best work, but the effort was still several cuts above most of the Fox western stories.

A CONQUERED PEOPLE WATCHED AS THE BODIES OF CLEOPATRA AND MARC ANTONY WERE CARRIED TO THEIR BURIAL — WITH FULLEST HONORS! AND SO ENDED THE REIGN OF CLEOPATRA - LAST OF THE ANCIENT LINE OF PHARAOHS!
MY TRIUMPH IS NOT WITHOUT ITS BITTERNESS!
CHEER UP, OCTAVIAN! IT ALL GOES WITH THE GAME OF EMPIRE! AH, BUT SHE WAS A LOVELY ONE!
THE END

Splash page and final panel from Timely's *Antony and Cleopatra* (*Ideal* #1, July 1948). That noise you hear is William Shakespeare rolling over in his grave.

Finally, an oddity. Fox occasionally ventured away from the sex and violence and into other areas. Most of these oddball titles were celebrity tie-ins, such as *Sabu, Frank Buck,* and *Dorothy Lamour* comics. *Meet Corliss Archer* lasted three issues for Fox, was an adaptation of the popular CBS Radio series about a teenage girl and her family, and as such, would be unremarkable if it were not for the work of Al Feldstein, a few years away from becoming one of the prime movers at E.C.

It is tempting to believe that Feldstein was putting someone on with his art on *Corliss Archer.* Perhaps he was poking fun at Victor Fox's editorial policy, which stressed the utilization of beautiful and well-endowed women on the flimsiest of premises. At any rate, Feldstein chose to draw Corliss Archer (and even her mother and her female friends) sporting the largest breasts this side of Diana Dors. Corliss had a chest that threatened

at any minute to topple her diminutive frame. She made Phantom Lady look like a boy. This is all the more remarkable when one considers that *Meet Corliss Archer* was in all other respects an innocuous little teen-laughs mag, not unlike the Archie series in storyline and character. Feldstein did his job competently for the three issue run, but one is still left marvelling at the bra sizes of his female characters.

For the reader desiring to pick up a few issues of Fox comics before the prices skyrocket out of sight (though some already have), I have listed below a few of the best bets. A representative collection of Fox funk should include at least one of each of the following titles:

Blue Beetle - Pick up at least one of the issues from #47 to #58. Before that, Dan Garrett's alter-ego was just another Golden Age super hero, but beginning around issue #47, the old sex and violence began creeping in. BB lasted two issues after #58, but by that time Fox, probably yielding to outside pressure from garden clubs and whatnot to "clean up the comics," had turned it back into a kid's mag. Many of the covers from BB's funk period were done by Jack Kamen—get one of these if possible.

Phantom Lady - Any of these are nice. They are, unfortunately, higher than a cat's back right now, priced a long way from the $2.00 I paid for my copy back in 1967. However, they are really swell, and almost worth the incredible prices that most dealers ask.

Jungle Titles - Fox kept the art on the jungle comics at a pretty high level, and most of the titles are virtually interchangable. Usually, a beautiful, half-clad white woman will be the head honcho of a tribe of natives, who worship her and go to her in times of need. This works also in mags like *Jo-Jo,* except that the boss is a man—with a beautiful white "mate"—who makes sure that things run smoothly in the land of the savages.

Zoot is the best title to try for, largely because of some excellent Kamen covers. Failing that, you might want to try picking up a copy of *Zago, Rulah, Jo-Jo, Zegra*, or the slightly offbeat *Dagar, Desert Hawk,* which abandons the jungle in favor of a desert milieu.

All-Top - Any issue from #8 to #16 is what to try for here. Before #8, *All-Top* was funny animal in nature, and not worth the pulp it was printed on. Beginning with #8, Blue Beetle, Phantom Lady, and Rulah took over the title, and rode herd on it, with slight modifications, all the way to the end.

Crimes by Women - You should have one of these around just to impress non-collectors of your acquaintance. I have personally won a little money by betting my disbelieving friends that there was actually a comic book called *Crimes by Women,* and then producing the evidence. Most of the covers are quite outrageous, with tough-talking women gunning down policemen and bystanders, etc. In a class by itself.

Three L.B. Cole covers. The first two are from Star's *Blue Bolt Weird Tales* (#114, August 1952, and #112, February 1952), the third from *Living Bible #3* (aka *Chaplains at War*), Spring, 1946.

Other Crime Titles - There were more Fox crime comics than anything else from that company, and many of them are still fairly cheap. Try for at least one of the following: *Murder Incorporated, Famous Crimes From Police Files, Inside Crime, Hunted,* or *March of Crime.* The art and stories are generally awful, but it's all pretty entertaining in a perverse sort of way.

Western Titles - Close on the heels of the crime comics were Fox's westerns. They were of course, also crime comics, with the gangsters on horseback instead of in cars. As a matter of fact, many of the western mags will have a lead story about cowboys preceding a batch of reprints from the crime comics. The best titles are *Women Outlaws, Western Killers,* and *Western Thrillers.* If you can't get one of those, try for a *Western True Crime* or *Western Outlaws.*

Love Titles - This is definitely bottom of the barrel. The true funk enthusiast will find some amusement here, but most of the Fox love stuff is dismal and plodding, far inferior to Star, Avon, and almost everyone else. They are cheap, however, and so you might want to be on the lookout for *My Story, My Secret Life, My Love Affair,* and *My Life.*

Miscellaneous Titles - The Wally Wood *tour de force,* "Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (*Star Presentations* #3, May 1950) is a must for the serious Funk Age collector, and you won't be disappointed with the art in any of the Feldstein *Meet Corliss Archer* efforts. In addition, most of the celebrity tie-in titles, mentioned above, can be picked up cheaply, but their interior art (with the exception of *Martin Kane, Private Eye,* which occasionally contains some pretty good Wood) is atrocious. Buy these last at your own risk.

Star Publications

Novelty Publications was a group that appeared on the comics scene in the early 1940's, and will be remembered—if they are remembered at all—for the numbing blandness of most of their titles, especially toward the end of the decade. Their most successful efforts,

if that is the correct word under the circumstances, were things like *Blue Bolt, Target, Four Most,* and the ever-popular *Dick Cole.* Anyone familiar with these titles knows how difficult they are to get rid of at conventions—you could get practically the whole run of *Target Comics* for a broken waffle iron and last week's *TV Guide* (except for the issues featuring Basil Wolverton's Spacehawk, of course).

Well, something happened to Novelty as the 1950's dawned. Superheroes, of course, were dying like mayflies, and Blue Bolt, Target and the Targeteers, The Chameleon, and all the other Novelty also-rans didn't have a chance. The company breathed a heavy sigh and died in 1949.

A typically nice cover from the *Phantom Lady* series (#15, Dec. 1947)

Or so it seemed. It was up to one Leonard B. Cole, an artist with the group, to resuscitate the company, breathe some new life into the titles, and in the process give Funk Era devotees the most famous one-two punch in all of funkdom.

The late months of 1949 saw a new company called Star Publications soar phoenix-like from the ashes of Novelty, under the guidance of Mr. Cole, Star's new publisher. At first, it looked as if Star was not going to be much different from its predecessor. Cole went on doing rather uninspired covers on the revamped titles, and the contents were tame. However, somewhere around 1952, Leonard Cole suddenly loosened up. His covers, which had been ordinary at best, suddenly blossomed into hideously graphic representations of monsters with bloody fingernails, walking skeletons wearing tattered garments, and disgusting beasts rising up out of swamps to dismember people, all rendered in a dark, moody, offbeat style. Imagine Aubrey Beardsley drawing with his toes while under the influence of Dexamyl, and you'll have a pretty good idea of Cole's work during this period.

The Cole covers alone would make Star's short tenure memorable (the company expired in the closing days of 1954), but old L.B. had an ace in the hole. It was Jay Disbrow, and he was funk personified.

Please permit me a digression here. Back around 1968, my friend Bruce Shults and I split a stack of "junk" comics that we had purchased from dealer/collector Eric Groves for practically nothing. Most of the stack consisted of cheap horror, love, jungle, and crime titles. After the split, I began to peruse my share of the take, and ran across several stories that were so unusual, so...*odd,* that they immediately and totally captivated me. It turned out they were all Star comics, and the artist that had moved me so was Jay Disbrow.

His characters were amazing. They were all out of proportion, frozen in poses that would tax the ingenuity of an

Ruiah imperiled, typically, by natives and snakes. Art by Jack Kamen. (*Zoot* #11, Dec. 1947)

India rubber man. The prose accompanying these pictures was suffering from a horrendous overdose of Burroughs (sample: "It was greed—stark, unreasoning greed which drove Recardo Monteze into the forbidden jungle in search of the fabled titanic white elephant of Taboa, and in spite of the heroic efforts of the Jungle Queen to stop him, he succeeded in finding his quarry, only to meet with a horrible death as a result of his quest."). When he wasn't talking you to death, he was frequently drawing large closeups of faces that registered one of two looks —surprise or apathy. But somehow it all worked, flowing together to create a separate reality, if you will, a world of people and animals and things that resembled the real world only superficially, taking off to someplace wholly alien.

A.C Hollingsworth did this cover for Trojan's *Beware* #8, March 1954. A year from now, the Funk Age of comics would be kaput.

Superman has his Bizarro world, where everything is askew in almost every way, although the inhabitants look *almost* human and the buildings *almost* like ours. Superman has his Bizarro world; we have Jay Disbrow.

My joy upon finding this man's work approached religious fervor. I *loved* his stuff. Couldn't get enough of it. There's really no use trying to explain it. It's like trying to explain my love for Rondo Hatton movies.

Anyway, I began to haunt dealers and conventions, in search of more of Disbrow's work. In that initial batch had been an issue of Star's *Mad* ripoff, *Unsane* #15 ("It's *crazier* than insane!" screams the cover), in which Jay had signed the story "Frank Bunk: Bring 'em Back Dead or Alive" as Jay "Monkey Man" Disbrow. I became frantic for the Monkey Man's work. It was a joke among my collector friends, who would save their Disbrow comics for me, selling them to me for twenty-five or fifty cents a hit.

A couple of years later I was called to the military. When I returned in 1974, I found that the Disbrow mania was threatening to grow to nationwide proportions. My elation at being recognized as the

COLLECTOR'S DREAM CLASSIFIED

BUY-SELL-TRADE

Trade: Interested in Silver age Comics. Looking to complete Spider-Man and Dr. Strange. Have many others. K. McGuinness, 1531½ N. Bronson, Los Angeles, CA 90028.

Buy, Sell, Trade: FIRST ISSUES ONLY. Send wants, list of issues to sell and condition with SASA. 1st Issue Clearinghouse, 2511 Pearwood, Houston, TX 77038

Trade: Collector seeks to trade comics, paperbacks, books, with others. Send your want list to: Paul Petterson, 11 S. Hill Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

For Sale: PITTSBURGH FAN FORUM, $1.00 sample copy. Typeset. Best damn zine around! From: Ben Pondexter, 827 Anaheim St., Pittsburgh, PA 15129. Try it! You'll love it.

Buying: I BUY COMICS. Mainly Marvels, some DCs. Send me a list of the comics you have to sell, with price and condition. Kevin Raulerson, P.O. Box 1112, Forrest City, AR 72335.

Buying: United States and foreign Picture Postcards, pre-1920. Ship or write for offer: Donald Reske, P.O. Box 491, Sturtevant, WI 53117.

Buying: Atlas weird titles. In extensive runs only, not book by book. Also looking for WIZARD OF ID newspaper strips; send for want list. Have extras. George Olshevsky, P.O. Box 127, Stn. T, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6B 3Z9.

Buy, Sell, Trade: Kellogs Pep Pins. I need: Fatstuff, Whimpy, Abretha Breeze, Snuffy Smith, and Auntie Blossom. Vic Mather, 3926 Netherfield, Philadelphia, PA 19129.

WANTED

Wanted: in fine condition: DAREDEVIL #1-5, 7, 50-52; X-MEN #1-7, 59-70, 77-94; Comic strip artwork (613) 728-4828. Paul M. Burbridge, 59 Melrose Ave. #2, Ottawa, Ont. Canada K1Y 1T8. WSA #1168.

Wanted: Artist to collaborate on new humorous comic strip. If interested, send sample of your work to: David Jobe, 1915 Denison, Memphis, TN 38111.

Wanted: GREEN LANTERN #76-89, TARZAN (Dell). Fine or better condition at reasonable prices. G. Boucher, 224 Fifth Ave., Ottawa, Ont.

Wanted: STAR HAWKS comic strips. Please write first. Send list with dates and prices to: Alex Lesueur, Drawer AC, Cullowhee, N.C. 28723.

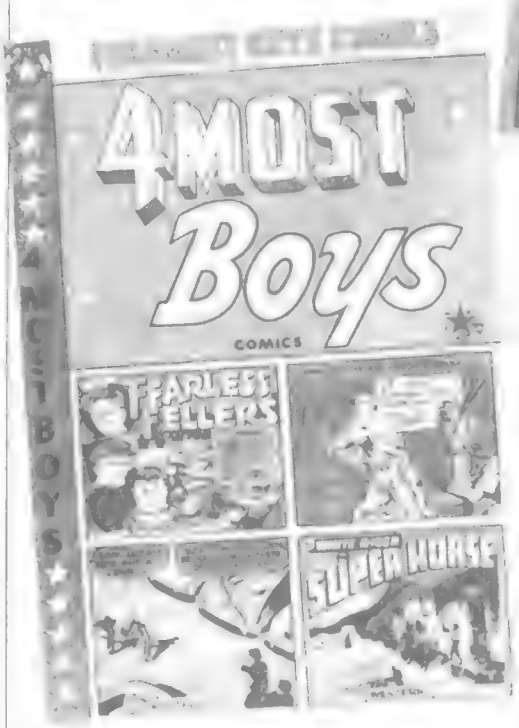
Wanted: Larry Ivie's MONSTER'S AND HEROES, old RBCC'S with Don Rosa indexes (specify which). Lou Mougin, 900 N.Betty, Monahans, TX 79756.

discoverer of the Monkey Man is dampened more than slightly by the fact that the issues I had been paying fifty cents a shot for have now skyrocketed to four and five dollars each. I still need many of them, and I am forced to pay the price.

Then, in 1976, Terry Stroud of the American Comic Book Company came to Oklahoma for a convention. He told me that he had been to a comic con in Pittsburgh that featured Jay Disbrow as a guest, that Disbrow was selling some newly created, autographed posters there, and asked if I would like to buy four of these posters for ten dollars. I did, a little bemusedly.

There is a lesson there somewhere, but, unfortunately, I can't figure out exactly what it is.

The team of Cole and Disbrow spanned about three years, with Cole doing the covers and Disbrow handling the lead story. Together, they worked on such titles as *Terrors of the Jungle, Blue Bolt Weird Tales* (a revamping of Novelty's *Blue Bolt* hero title), *Spook Detective Cases, Startling Terror Tales, Shocking Mystery Cases*, and even some romance



Star's innocuous *4-Most Boys*, a continuation of the old Novelty title, was indicative of L.B. Cole's pre-funk cover work (#37, Nov-Dec 1949)

titles (in which Disbrow was likely to sign his name "Jayson," and once, inexplicably, "Ken W. Fitch."). Cole was more prolific than Disbrow, handling the covers for virtually every Star publication from 1951 to 1954.

There was some kind of odd relationship between Fox, who died at about the time Cole began to transmogrify Novelty, and Star, although it may extend no farther than the fact that Star reprinted a lot of Fox's old stuff. This is one thing to watch for when collecting Star comics. Many of them will have a lead story —frequently by Disbrow—that is new, fronting a collection of reprints. Sometimes there is nothing new at all in the issue, unless one counts the Cole cover. And Star not only reprinted Fox, but they

Splash page from *Blue Beetle* #54, March 1948.

also ran the old Novelty stuff from time to time. This cheap method of filling issues can sometimes yield unexpected dividends—there are some Wolverton Spacehawks in Star's horror titles, and at least one Phantom Lady story was run by Cole (in *Jungle Thrills* #16). More often than not, though, the stories L.B. chose to recycle are pretty dismal reading, especially some of the old Novelty stuff. So, before you buy, check out the interior of the comic—some are reprints of entire Fox or Novelty mags. This is especially prevalent in the jungle and crime titles (and in their only two western mags that I know of, *Western Crime Cases* and *Outlaws*). *Caveat emptor.*

The only really big news in Star artists is the work of Cole and Disbrow. These are the guys to go after. A man named George Peltz showed some promise in *Startling Terror Tales* and *All-Famous Police Cases*, being especially good with facial expressions, so you might want to look at his work too. Forget about the rest of the artists. Except for an occasional reprint of Kamen's jungle work for Fox, some Wolverton, and *Startling Terror Tales* #10, which reprints the entire Fox "Jekyll and Hyde" by Wally Wood, *sans* his cover, the reader is advised to seek elsewhere for top-drawer delineation.

For a representative Star sampling, try these:

Horror Titles - *Blue Bolt Weird Tales* or *Startling Terror Tales* are the best bets here. *Blue Bolt Weird Tales* #113 is especially nice, with three Disbrows and a Wolverton reprint. *Ghostly Weird, Spook Detective Cases, Shocking Mystery Cases,* and *Horrors of War* are good second choices. Try to get a couple of these; they're still fairly cheap.

Crime Titles - If you pick up a horror title, you'll probably get some crime stories along with it, since most of the horror mags contain crime story reprints. If you want a "pure" example of Star's gangster output, get an issue of *All-Famous Police Cases* or *Crime Fighting Detective.* But be warned: None of those I've seen are very good. Ditto for the western crime titles.

Jungle Titles - The attractiveness of Star's jungle titles will depend a lot on how much you like Fox's work in that area, since most of each issue consists of reprints from *Rulah, Jo-Jo, Zago,* etc. There are some good Jay Disbrow stories (and that man draws a mighty fine elephant) in *Terrors of the Jungle* and *Terrifying Tales* (which, despite its title, is African adventure from beginning to end). Second-stringers are *Jungle Adventure* and *Jungle Thrills* (with one exception, cited later).

Romance Titles - These range from nice (Disbrow) to abysmal (Fox reprints). Try to get one that features Ken W. Fitch, Jayson, or Jay Disbrow, since they're all the same person anyway.

Unsane #15 - A must. This gem contains two Disbrows, two Peltzes, and an L.B. Cole cover. As far as I know, this was the only issue of *Unsane,* and it's not difficult to see why. Instead of attempting their usual horrific work, all of the above-named men are trying to be funny, with predictable results. Unadulterated funk of the highest caliber.

Jungle Thrills #7 - This is perhaps the *creme de la creme* of any Disbrow collection. During the 3-D comic craze, the Monkey Man made an ill-advised excursion into an ersatz form of that medium. The cover tells us all about it—"PICTURESCOPE! A NEW ILLUSION WITHOUT GLASSES!" The only illusion proves to be the one that Disbrow was laboring under when he created the art. It is all in black and white, with full page drawings put up against a kind of movie screen backdrop so as to resemble 3-D. They don't, of course, but the resultant effect was perhaps even better. And you didn't have to fool with any glasses to get it.

ONLY ONCE IN THE LONG LONG TIME DURING DAN'S ABSENCE DID TONI'S LETTERS TELL HIM THE TRUTH AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER SENDING THAT ONE LETTER HER HEART CRIED OUT IN ANGUISH. IF SHE COULD ONLY----
TAKE BACK THOSE WORDS
by Ken W. Fitch
"DARLING IF YOU ONLY KNEW HOW I WAIT FOR MAIL CALL! HOW I LIVE FOR YOUR LETTERS THAT TELL ME OVER AND OVER THAT YOU LOVE ME! HOW I LIVE AGAIN OUR EVERY PRECIOUS MOMENT TOGETHER!"
RING!
JAYSON

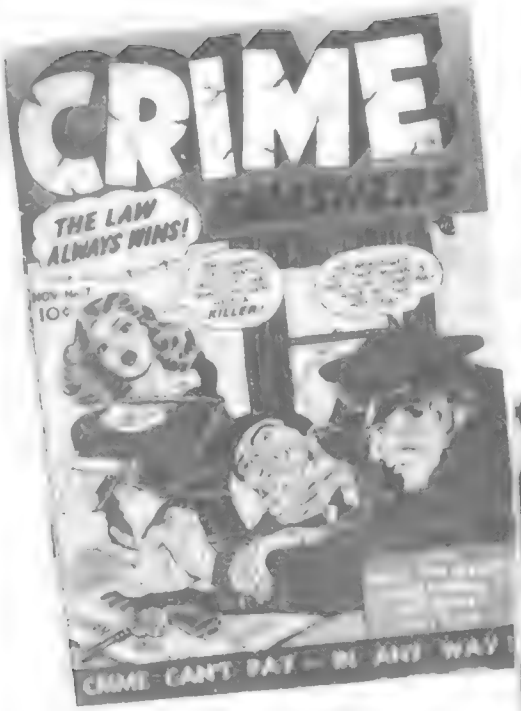
Jay Disbrow tries to pretend he is someone named Ken W. Fitch, in this lead story from Star's *True-to-Life Romances* #15, January 1953.

Avon/Realistic

While the relationship between Fox and Star may be tenous and hard to pin down, Avon and Realistic fit together like hand and glove. They had the same artists, the same storylines, and even some of the same titles. A magazine (i.e. *Gangsters and Gun Molls, Parole Breakers*) might start with Avon, only to end up under the Realistic banner. When I first started collecting these comics, I held the somewhat romantic notion that Avon used Realistic as a place from which to launch their raunchier titles. I have since discarded that theory, since some of the Avon stuff is as suggestive and bloody as anything done by Realistic.

One is tempted to view A/R as E.C. without the quality writing. This, however, is also not true. Although most of Avon/Realistic's top-line illustrators compared favorably with E.C.s (and, indeed, many good artists of the time worked for both companies), their benchwarmers were several cuts below anyone E.C. had, up to and including the guys in the mail room. A really well-drawn

A Carter character sweating. From Fox's *Murder Incorporated* #2, March 1948.



***Crime Smashers* #7, November 1951. From Trojan.**

story might be sandwiched between two turkeys, and this turkey sandwich effect was what kept A/R from being really, consistently top-notch.

What the Avon/Realistic efforts lacked in art and writing, they made up for in outrageousness. Who else would have had the guts to release the *Action* #1 of funkdom, *Reform School Girl*? Perhaps Victor Fox, in his salad days; but no one else would have touched a title like that with a barge pole. Some other swell titles from A/R were *Gangsters and Gun Molls, Murderous Gangsters, The Savage Raids of Chief Geronimo,* and a one-shot called *The Hooded Menace*.

A/R, under the editorship of Sol Cohen, rode onto the scene during the last days of the superhero cycle with an oater called *Cow Puncher.* This comic began featuring some good cowgirls in bondage covers with its second issue, and was further distinguished by having one of the few letter columns published at that time. Mr. Cohen could certainly spot his trends. In addition to adding more western titles to his stable almost immediately, he began a line of crime, horror, and science fiction mags, unleashing them upon a public that had tired of the costumed hero and was ready to move on to something else.

The comic books, of course, were only part of the Avon line of publications. In the late 1940's, Avon was also producing a line of paperback novel reprints, which were very successful, plus several paperback anthologies on a more or less continuing basis—*The Avon Fantasy Reader* and *The Avon Science Fiction Reader,* for instance. Although the comics line dribbled away soon after the advent of the Comics Code, finally dying around 1958, the paperback arm of the outfit is still going strong today.

A comparison may be in order here. Generally, Fox, Star, and Avon/Realistic worked within the same genres (although Avon was light on jungle stuff and Star turned its nose up at westerns). The crime and western titles from A/R weren't quite as bloody, on the whole, as Fox's but they were usually better written and drawn. The Avon stuff does not have as much true funk appeal as

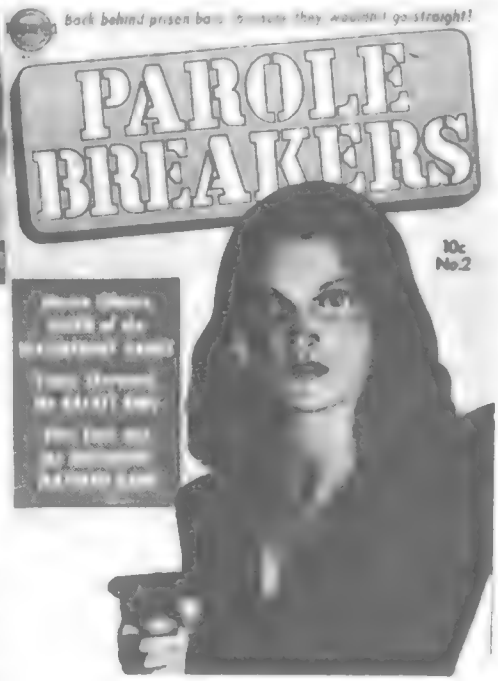


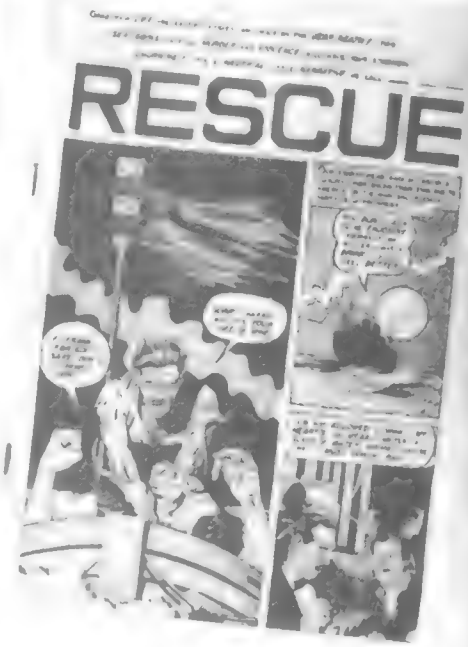
Photo cover from Realistic's *Parole Breakers* #2, April 1952.

Star, but when A/R got outrageous, they could be *very* outrageous. One might label Avon/Realistic, then as the front-runner in terms of stylish sleaze—Fox was gritty and naturalistic, Star was off-the-wall and fantastic, and Avon/Realistic was glossy and—what else?—realistic.

A distinguishing feature about A/R should be mentioned. Around 1951, the company got into the habit of running black-and-white montages on the inside front covers of its comics, as a kind of preview-of-coming-attractions within the issue. This page almost always featured the best art in the issue, up to and including the cover. An artist named Everett Raymond Kinstler did most of these. He was an excellent craftsman, with a fine eye for detail, and about the only top-line artist at A/R that did not, at some point, do work for E.C. Comics. Other artists that sometimes worked on these montages were Wallace Wood, Syd Shores (a former *Captain America* artist), John Rosenberger (later with ACG), and Louis Ravielli, who hit his peak with A/R and then disappeared.

As I said before, Everett Raymond Kinstler deserves special mention. His work is frequently gorgeous, in the same league as the Frazetta/Williamson schools. He drew an occasional interior story in just about every genre—love, western, crime, horror—and every one of them is certainly worth having. After Avon folded its comics line, Kinstler went on to become a portrait painter, a move perhaps foreshadowed by his lifelike and realistic delineations of Lizabeth Scott, Alan Ladd, and John Ireland in the comic book adaptation of the film *Red Mountain,* done for Avon in 1952.

Alvin C. Hollingsworth, rumored to be the first Black artist to break into comics, did work for just about every horror outfit in the 1950's, but he reserved his best work for Avon/Realistic. Here was a man who was just about as uneven as they come. When he wanted to be good, he could render his stories in a nice, loose, Art Deco style that was very pleasing, aesthetically speaking. Unfortunately, his art for other companies almost looks like it was rushed, hacked out quickly for rent money or something. Perhaps Hollingsworth never reached his full potential as a comic book illustrator, but he came closest in titles like *Witchcraft,* done under the Avon imprint.



The splash page of the lead story in *Fight Against Crime* #16, November 1953, from Story Comics. Count the E.C. swipes in this picture.

Another sometimes good/sometimes bad illustrator also saved his best shots for Avon/Realistic. Louis Ravielli started out in the 1940's; he is in at least one Fox title that I know of. His A/R work was done in the crime genre, mostly, and in oddball titles like *The Hooded Menace,*

a Klu Klux Klan sendup from Realistic. At best, Ravielli is a talented hack, but almost every one of his stories contains an occasional flash, a glimmer of something lurking behind the mediocrity.

Howard L. Larsen worked largely in the western titles, especially *Wild Bill Hickock*, but a story of his could occasionally be seen backing up the lead features in crime and love comics. Larsen's style looks like a remnant of the 1940's—bulky figures, broad dark outlines, and lots of shading. (The only exception to this is his work on *Slave Girl Princess*, which was probably inked

Avon's one-shot, *For A Night of Love* (1951), contained adaptations of Emile Zola stories. This could also be titled *The Great French Naturalist Meets Louis Ravielli in Four-Color.*

by someone else more "modern" in style.) It is sometimes jarring to find Larsen's staid and leisurely artwork in the middle of a frenetic, slug-and-shoot Avon crime book; the difference in approaches is significant.

The symbolic, highly personalized style of Joe Kubert is frequently displayed in the A/R product. He seemed to enjoy himself most in the western comics, where he could lend his moody style to the mythic figure of the old west loner. His crime and horror work were only slighty less successful.

In addition to the above artists, Wallace Wood and Jack Kamen also showed up in A/R mags from time to time, with both of them doing work that was characteristic of their always high standards. The careful reader can also spot present-day Marvel artist, John Romita, in some of Avon's love titles, and DC/Marvel legend Carmine Infantino in *Prison Break* #5, his budding style all but obscured by the colorless inking of Vince Alascia, the former *Captain America* inker who parlayed his questionable talent into a long and profitable comic book career.

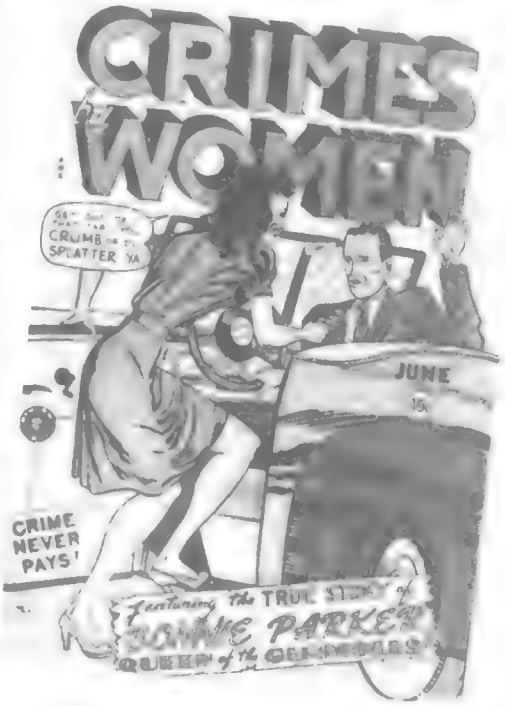
Mention also should be made of Syd Shores, one-time partner of Alascia during Timely Comics' golden days. He was called upon by A/R to illustrate their shoot-'em-up hoodlum titles, and performed the task with frequent relish. As a matter of fact, some of his work on the inside front cover montages compares favorably with both Kinstler's and Wood's stuff.

Although Avon/Realistic had quite a few continuing titles, many of their publications were one-shots (the reader is referred to Wood's *Mask of Fu Manchu, Earthman on Venus,* and *Rocket to the Moon;* Ravielli's *Hooded Menace;* and Kinstler's *Red Mountain—Quantrill's Raiders* for starters), eventually finding their way into other A/R titles as reprints. Just about any of these are nice to have

Charlton's *True Life Secrets* #23 (Nov.-Dec. 1954). You can bet that the answer to the question isn't (a) "mend my socks," (b) "take care of my dog while I'm out of town," or (c) "tell me the quickest way to get to Philadelphia."

(with the possible exception of *Robot of the Lost Planet,* with art by the spectacularly untalented Gene Fawcette), but I have not listed them below because there are so many. I have instead concentrated on titles that lasted more than one issue (excepting *Reform School Girl*) as the basis for a good start on a Funk Age Avon/Realistic collection.

Reform School Girl - I bought my copy from Wilt Conine in 1969 for $20, an unheard of price at the time. No, you can't get one for that anymore. Its reputation as the *piece de resistance* of funk is justified almost solely by the cover, and by that cover's reproduction in Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent.*



Bonnie Parker talks tough on a *Crimes by Women* cover. (#1, June 1948)

The insides are disappointing, punk and shallow when compared to the promise of the cover. Still, if you can find a good buy on it, get it, and be the envy of your pals.

Cow Puncher - This is an early Avon title that expired in 1949, but not before it had run some fine cowgirl art. Number 1 has a bland cover, but beginning with Kamen's work on the front of issue 2, Avon trots out the buckskin headlights. Almost every issue's cover was done by a different artist, and virtually all of them gave Kamen a run for his money in the bondage department. Try to get any issue after #1.

Crime Titles - Some of the crime comics have photo covers, some are drawn in a style to resemble photography, and some are just drawn. Almost all the covers, and the stories behind them, are worthwhile. My personal choices are *Gangsters and Gun Molls, Murderous Gangsters, Police Lineup, Parole Breakers,* and the *Avon* (later *Realistic*) *Famous Gangsters* series, a kind of Gangster-of-the-Month title that featured nice work by Wood. If you can't find one or two of these titles, try for any *Prison Break, Prison Riot,* or *Sensational Police Cases.*

Western Titles - Sol Cohen must have had a thing for westerns. There were a

lot of them under the Avon banner, and they really formed the backbone of the company's output. Besides the above-mentioned *Cow Puncher,* the seminal Avon western, you should try for a couple of the following: *Jesse James* (be careful with these—some are post-Comics Code), *Wild Bill Hickock* (ditto) , *Geronimo, Fighting Indians of the Wild West, Kit Carson,* and any of the one-shots like *Butch Cassidy* and *Last of the Comanches.* Look for Kinstler in these—he did a lot of them.

Horror and Science Fiction Titles - Get at least one of the pre-Code *Strange Worlds.* The title ran for 22 issues, making it one of the more successful SF comics, and prices range from pretty low to very high (#8, for instance, is worth megabucks because of the collaborative efforts of Wood, Krenkel, Frazetta, and Williamson on one of the stories). Over in the horror department, both *Eerie* and *Witchcraft* are good to have, although you'll probably have better luck finding *Eerie* because of its longer run (17 issues as opposed to 6 for *Witchcraft*). My personal pick of the horror batch is *Witchcraft* #5, which sports a beautiful cover by SF great Frank Kelly Freas, an inside front cover by Kinstler, and some nice interior art by Hollingsworth.

Love Titles - The love/confession efforts from Avon and Realistic are probably about the best ever published, which is not to say that they are good, just that they are good in comparison to anyone else's attempts. Certainly, they are the most sexually suggestive of the 50's romance comics. The climax of several of these stories revolves, with various modifications, around the heroine's being led to a motel room by the man who had caused her to spurn her upright, honest boyfriend for a few cheap thrills. She never actually goes in, of course, but even the hint of going all the way without benefit of clergy must've been pretty hotcha back then. Best are the Realistic efforts like *Intimate Confessions,* which frequently mix in a little crime with the smashmouthing. You might also want to get Avon's (later Realistic's) *Realistic Romances* and/or *Romantic Love.* Last time I looked, these were pretty cheap. Get 'em while they're cold.

Other Titles - *The Saint* was the closest thing that Avon had to a superhero title, and it's pretty good. (The Saint stories show up from time to time in Avon's other mags, with all references to the Saint eliminated in favor of the name "Michael Strong." They remain identical to the originals in all other respects.) Roughly based on the Leslie Charteris character, Avon's Saint is a two-fisted privated eye that slugs his way through some nicely done stories. At least one issue (#6) features an honest-to-Pete superheroine—Miss Fury, reprinted from Tarpe Mills' newspaper strip (Timely had her for a while in the early 1940's). A *Saint* is not essential to an Avon/Realistic collection, but it is certainly a title worth collecting.

SHOCKING DOPE EXPOSE
TEEN-AGE DOPE SLAVES
SOMEHOW I DON'T COUNT! CASH ON THE LINE, SUCKER... OR NO SHOT!
PLEASE-PLEASE LET ME HAVE MORE! SOMEHOW!

***Harvey Comics Library* #1, better known as *Teen-Age Dope Slaves* (Apr. 1952).**

As far as I know, the five issues of *White Princess of the Jungle,* featuring "Taanda" in the title role, represents Avon's only entry in the jungle derby. Most of the art is undistinguished, but Kinstler saves the day in a few of them with good covers and interior art. Try one.

Other Companies

Fox, Star, and Avon/Realistic represent, to me, the best sources of consistent funk—the big three, if you will, of the Funk Age of Comics. In addition to them, there are a number of lesser companies (and in some cases, lesser efforts by mainstream companies) that should be represented in any solid funk collection.

The first of these is Trojan Publications. In the 1930's and 40's, Trojan published pulp magazines like *Speed Detective, Hollywood Detective, Speed Western, Speed Adventure,* and *Private Detective.* (An offshoot of theirs, Culture Publications, achieved under-the-counter status with their *Spicy* series of pulps: *Spicy Western, Spicy Adventure, Spicy Detective,* etc., in which authors rapturously described the female bosom with adjectives generally reserved for tent revivals and prayer meetings.) Interestingly, the Trojan pulp product frequently ran black-and-white comic book stories in

some of their western and detective magazines. So when Trojan, under the editorship of Adolphe Barreaux, decided it was time to venture into the comic book field, they had some ready-made material. All they had to add was color.

The best thing about the Trojan detective comics was the presence of Dan Turner, Hollywood Detective, in panel form, as written by that unsung genius, Robert Leslie Bellem. For the pulps, Bellem wrote detective stories like no one else, taking the hard-boiled idiom to such a degree that, like Jay Disbrow, he ended up creating a separate reality. The so-called parodies of the private eye story that are currently in vogue will never be able to touch Bellem—his was an effortless, natural style, without one bit of the self-consciousness or any of the contrivance that marks most efforts to "do something different" with the genre. To wit:

> It began with a banshee shriek from a she-male bit player in the first row of ringside seats; a scream that wasn't in the scenario. The jane who gave issue to this inhuman outcry was a shapely blonde tomato wearing a sports skirt and a sweater. Under her heavy yellow movie makeup I could see her pan turning seven shades of pale as she opened her kissable yap for another bleat...I gave her a shove that sent her sprawling. Then I was crowding myself through the ropes of the squared circle. "You lousy double-crossing jerk!" I yowled at the Brennan blister.
>
> He whirled, hung the inflamed glare on me. "Lay off, flatfoot. Lorimer had it coming. I told you he swiped my sweetie."
>
> —from "Shooting Schedule"
> *Speed Detective*
> Volume 2, #1
> July 1943

"One man's funk is another man's symbolic reality. Or: funk, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder."

FRANK BUNK
"BRING 'EM BACK DEAD OR ALIVE"
I ALWAYS GET WHAT I GO AFTER, EVEN THOUGH THE ANIMALS DO RUN IN TERROR WHEN THEY SEE ME COMING!
LUCIFER, A SAVAGE KING TAIL

The Monkey Man does his best to be funny. (From Star's *Unsane* #15, June 1954)

Comics being, of course, primarily visual media, Bellem's style was toned down considerably for *Crime Smashers,* the Trojan ten-center that reprinted the detective pulp inserts. But his unique way with a story is still very much in evidence, complemented in most issues by the exactly right artwork of one Max Plaisted, a frequent illustrator of second-string pulps. (Occasionally Barreaux, the editor, would pinch hit for Plaisted on a Dan Turner story). Joining Bellem and Plaisted's Hollywood Detective in *Crime Smashers* were Sally the Sleuth, Gail Ford (a.k.a. Girl Friday), and Ray Hale, with other characters appearing from time to time. All of these stories, at least the ones in the early issues, were pulled directly from the pulps. The writing is adult-oriented, which, considering the origins of the stories, is not surprising.

Just about any issue of *Crime Smashers* is a good bet for your collection. The art is competent, the writing is good, and the mostly-covert sex and overt violence is plentiful. So far, I've found these to be pretty cheap, too, one of the few really good funk titles not commanding an extraordinarily high price.

Another Trojan mag along the same lines was *Western Crime Busters,* which featured comic strips from Trojan's western pulps along with non-reprint material. There weren't many of these, so they may be harder to find, but they are still good, roughly equal to *Crime Smashers* in quality. Later on, around, 1953, the contents of both of these titles began to vary, so it would be wise to check the insides of any you are planning to buy.

Barreaux's outfit also published a group of horror titles which expired in mid-1955, another casualty of the Comics Code. The best of the Trojan stuff—and I use the term "best" advisedly—is *Beware,* which had a fourteen issue run, and once boasted a cover by Frank Frazetta (#10). An artist to watch for here is Myron Fass, a semi-decent practitioner of the blood-and-craziness school. Most entertaining about Fass was the way he signed his art. It was as if just putting down his name weren't enough; he had to add a little something. So we get art signed by "Mad Artist Myron Fass," "Nuts Myron Fass," "Insane Myron Fass," and so forth. Recently a group of rather sleazy magazines that deal with the current rock scene (*Punk Rock* and *Acid Rock* are two examples) have appeared on newsstands. The publisher? You guessed it. Assuming it is the *same* Myron Fass at the helm of these efforts, it's somehow reassuring to see that he's still around in the exploitation field, where he doubtless belongs.

One of the Fass *Beware* comics is just about right for a beginning funk collection. Two may be one too many.

Religious funk is an area that I mention with some trepidation. The old cliche goes that anyone will argue about two things: religion and politics. As I said at the beginning of this article, funk is definitely a value judgment, and I'm not here to make anyone indignant by suggesting that religion is something to laugh at. It isn't; but some of its more peculiar manifestations, like the religious comic books, may be.

Skypilot, subtitled "Fighting Missionary of the Far North," ran two issues for Ziff-Davis before he went to meet his Maker in 1950. Some say that the comic featured art by Frank *Borth,* but is seems to me that the F.B. who initialed the stories looks more like Frank *Bolle,* an artist who later had the job of illustrating the adventures of John Hawks, the Skypilot of the title, who (along with his "faithful Eskimo friend, Naluk") wandered around the great northwest, spouting pithy epigrams and hitting people, not necessarily in that order. The lead story in #10 (which is the first issue)

features the Skypilot, standing over the prostrate bodies of two bad guys, casually rolling down his sleeves. In the background, two grizzled trappers are commenting on Hawk's performance.

Grizzled Trapper #1: Gosh! I never knowed that the Skypilot could punch like that!
GT #2: Yep! He delivers a powerful sermon, and packs a mighty punch. What a man!

In addition to *Skypilot,* at least one other religious comic book deserves mention, and that is *Living Bible* #3, referred to on its cover as *Chaplains at War.* For my money, this is the best cover that Leonard B. Cole (in a rare appearance away from his Star outfit) ever did. To be sure, his work on *Ghostly Weird, Horrors of War, Blue Bolt Weird Tales,* etc., is nice stuff, but *Chaplains at War* reveals an unexpected side of the man. Green of different hues predominate on the cover, the khaki green of the four chaplains' uniforms with the almost unearthly greens of the ocean water that swirls around their chests. The faces on the chaplains are especially unsettling—the eyes of a couple of them, on occasion, have seemed to follow me around the room. It is a disturbing, off-center, *tour-de-force* for Cole, lifelike and yet unworldly. Get this one if you can.

Harvey Comics is one outfit not known for their funk (unless you count some of their fifties horror titles—or things like *Richie Rich,* which I don't), but they did manage to produce, with *Harvey Comics Library* #1, a highly sought after item en-

Getting serious, Jay Disbrow ("Jayson" for the romance titles) knocks out a splash page for *Confessions of Romance* #10, Aug. 1954, Star Publications.

BIO:

John Wooley was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and grew up in Chelsea, Oklahoma. His childhood was spent with horror movies, comic books and *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine. Otherwise, he was normal, a relative term at best.

He first broke into print in the 1962 issue of the *Susan Gordon Fan Club Annual,* and while in junior high, high school, and college worked regularly for half-and-completely-forgotten fanzines, including his own *Bloody Good* and (with Bruce Shults) *Torture-Murder Pictorial.* In 1969, he became a big time pro by selling a script to Warren's *Eerie* magazine, and repeated this feat a couple more times before joining the Navy Reserve in 1970. He was sent by Uncle Sam to the Gulf of Tonkin, and later to Haiphong Harbor, ending his military stint by serving as a crewman on the Skylab II recovery ship.

Wooley also published poetry in *The Garfield Lake Review, Logos,* and Doubleday's book *Intro 8.* He edited *Dreamtrip* magazine, wrote a column for *The Nostalgia Journal,* and now contributes book reviews to *The Sunday Oklahoman.* He has just finished his first novel. Currently, Wooley is an English Composition instructor at Oscar Rose Junior College in Midwest City, Oklahama. He is 5'11", married, and his favorite color is mauve.

And Jayson does another splash page for Star, this one from *Confessions of Love* #13, Dec. 1952.

titled *Teen-Age Dope Slaves.* This is one comic book that delivers what is promised on the cover. Inside is a story, reprinted from *Rex Morgan, M.D.* newspaper strips, that concerns the misadventures of a boy named Bruce Grayson(!), who flushes his life down the toilet by becoming hooked on the hard stuff. The pusher, Manny, is a perfect stereotype of the standard fifties drug dealer, complete with snap-brim hat, oily hair, and a pencil-thin moustache. On the inside back cover, Rex Morgan issues a strongly worded warning titled "Dope Leads to Death!" He cautions his readers to beware of "fellow students" who display certain symptoms, including an "inability to eat." Obviously, Dr. Morgan hadn't had much experience with marijuana users.

Although many of the third-rate fifties horror comics tried to look as much like the leader in the field, E.C., as possible, the first prize for creative plagarism has to go to Story Comics' *Fight Against Crime.* An example is reproduced here. *Fight Against Crime* not only copied the panel layout, lettering, and style, they also stole some of their stories. (Except for slightly different denouements, Story's "Foul Ball," published in *Fight Against Crime* #16, November 1953, is a direct ripoff of "Foul Play," in E.C.s *Haunt of Fear* #19, May-June 1953.) To be completely fair about it, Story's artwork wasn't all that bad when compared to the other horror work being done at that time. But, where E.C. had Ghastly Graham Ingels, Jack Kamen, Johnny Craig, Jack Davis, and George Evans rendering their terror tales, the best

Story had to offer were the likes of John D'Agostino, Hy Fleishman, and Doug Wildey. As you can see, the quality tends to drop off just a little there.

Story's horror titles are cheap and interesting. Get a couple if you can.

Timely is represented in our funk collection by the first issue of an attempt to slice off a little of the *Classics Illustrated* market. It is called *Ideal* ("A Classical Comic"), and the featured classical potboiler is Timely's adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra*. Cleopatra, on the splash page, looks like Millie the Model with an asp. The story seems to borrow about equally from Shakespeare and George Bernard Shaw, but the attempts to modernize the dialogue make it sound

like a Harlequin romance filtered through Mickey Spillane. Timely will certainly be remembered as one of the two or three best Golden Age companies to come along; however, this effort, done in 1948 must surely rank as one of their misfires. It is enough of a misfire to be interesting, and I think it might have a place in any good funk collection.

Purple Claw, a title from Minoan Publishing that ran for three issues in the early fifties, is one of the very few attempts I know of to combine the horror and superhero formats. It seems that Dr. Jonathan Weir crash lands in the African jungle during World War II, where he encounters an old native geezer who enlists his help in fighting a disease that's laying waste to a nearby village. Weir correctly diagnoses the disease as malaria, saves the village, and is preparing to leave when the old man stops him. "I have a parting gift for you," says the native. "A gift that will give you greater power than you already possess!" He then hands Weir a glove-looking affair called the Purple Claw, telling him about the "strange power" that it imparts to its wearer.

The old man never goes into detail about what, if any, powers the wearer of the Purple Claw receives. And, although

Typical cover and panel from *Jungle Thrills* (even though it says *Jungle Adventures* on the cover) #7 (1954). That's L.B. Cole on cover, Disbrow on interior.

Weir occasionally uses it to somehow ferret out evil, most of the time he just goes around hitting people with it, something that could be accomplished equally well with a good blackjack. Always, however, Weir/Purple Claw gets involved with situations that contain all the trappings of horror—old tombs, Balkan castles, mad doctors, zombies, malevolent ghosts, and, once, giant black widow spiders that turned into women. Done by the not-awesomely talented team of Ben Brown and David Gantz, *The Purple Claw* makes a nice addition to your library of funk.

Capitol Stories (later Charlton) created another hybrid title along about 1952. *Space Western* lasted for six issues (#40-#45) and is just what the title indicates—a space opera with cowboys. If you want to know how the cowboys and spacemen got together, you'll have to ask someone else. Even though I have a few issues, I'm not quite sure just what's going on. In a typical issue (#45), for instance, there has been some sort of nuclear war, and the warheads were evidently launched from the planet Mars, where Hitler lives, planning another comeback attempt. Spurs Jackson, operating from his ranch on Earth, and Strongbow, his Indian companion, stumble onto a valley where dinosaurs still exist, which turn out to be controlled by aliens, who...well, you get the idea. Occasionally, there was come nice artwork in the book; more often, it was hacked out. Get a representative issue of this one for the absurd plotting and milieu.

A final mention of one other Capitol/Charlton publication. The cover of the otherwise undistinguished *True Life Secrets* #23 (reprinted here) is perhaps the most sexually suggestive cover ever to adorn a comic mag, blowing such contenders as *Reform School Girl* right out of the gym. It is a pure statement of funk, and should be picked up as a representation of just how far a company could go in those good old Funk Age days before psychologists, senators, and well-meaning parents took control

"Insane Myron Fass" in Trojan's *Beware* #8.

of the comics media; before the Comics Code declawed and defanged any attempts at true, nitty-gritty exploitation; and before anyone could tell any publisher when and how to clean up his own backyard. Funk comics were run by men whose only guideline was good taste, and there was precious little of that around the offices of Fox, Star, Avon Realistic, et al. What I have described—and forgive me, please, if I have not mentioned your favorite—is only the tip of the Funk Age iceberg. Somewhere out there, at nostalgia conventions, specialty bookstores, and maybe even in someone's attic, are hundreds upon hundreds more titles just waiting to be unearthed. If you are truly interested in the bizarre, the exploitative, the unusual, the outrageous—in short, if you are interested in funk, then it's your move, partner. ■

Collector's Dream Talks to:

STERANKO

Nobody who has read and collected comics in the past twelve years needs an introduction to Jim Steranko. His work on the Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD strip in **Strange Tales** completely transformed it from a semi-farcical super-spy thriller into an explosive moody, dynamic, richly-textured, exotic and even psychedelic masterpiece of graphic design. With less than thirty published stories, Steranko has had an impact on the field of comic art which has not yet subsided and which may forever defy accurate measurement.

Steranko was born in 1938, and spent his pre-comic years as a carnival pitchman, escape artist, stage magician, musician and singer, and martial artist. He picked up the elements of the graphic arts on the job, working in all phases of printing technology from ad agency copy writing to operating presses, and had no formal art training before breaking into comics in 1966. After his short stint at Marvel, the only comics company to have published his art (he scripted for Harvey Comics for a very brief interval during 1966), he moved on to start his own company, Supergraphics, which became the primary vehicle for his subsequent work. Perhaps his most enthusiastic and lasting contribution to comic appreciation is the two-volume (projected six-volume) **History of Comics**; but he has also published innumerable posters, calendars, booklets, prints and related comic desiderata. He currently pours much effort into his periodical **Mediascene**, and keeps his paint brush wet creating covers for Pyramid's series of Shadow paperbacks. Besides countless fan and semiprofessional awards, he has received the ACBA Special Recognition Award (1972) and the Club Desmis de la Bande Dessinees International Best Artist Award (1973). He has already done the cover for the fourth **Marvel Comics Index** featuring the Fantastic Four and the Silver Surfer, and is slated to do the Captain America cover (Part 8A) and one other later in the series.

Steranko is notoriously difficult to interview, but your intrepid reporters finally managed to corner him—after a good deal of effort—at the 1977 San Diego Comic Art Convention, when at about 4:00 AM the following (necessarily brief) conversation took place.

©1978 James Steranko

Illustration by Franc Reyes

George Olshevsky.: Just to get started, tell us some stories about your beginnings in this field. Your first published comic book work appeared in *Strange Tales*—the Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD strip. How did you come to draw that series?

Steranko.: It's about the dullest thing that's ever happened to me, George. Basically, I just walked into Marvel's offices and said, "Here's my work. Can you use me?" Right off the street. I also got a job with Paramount Pictures the same time. That was a day I could do no wrong; nobody was able to say no to me. I was at the peak of a psychic high.

G.: You began by finishing Jack Kirby's layouts, if I remember correctly.

S.: Stan called me into his office and asked, "What would you like to do for us?" The strip I wanted most to do was Nick Fury, which at the time was being done by John Buscema. And Stan said, "Okay, you've got it." That's all there was to it. But Stan felt that I needed some, let's say apprenticeship, and he told me I'd be working over Jack's layouts for a couple of issues. As a student of Jack Kirby, I thought I could do a terrific job; I've been studying his art practically my entire life. I love his stuff; Jack is the *king*. It's no secret how I feel about his work. I finished two stories and then Stan said, "Okay, you're on your own now." But at that point I thought I still needed Jack as a crutch; I did another story. All three turned out so incredibly primitive that I finally decided, "No more. I'll begin my own right now." Stan, as always, said, "Fine. Do it." That was the start of my own style. I love Jack's work, but we have two entirely different kinds of storytelling techniques. Jack would put an establishing shot here and a closeup there, and I'd feel it should be done just the opposite. It was our incompatible storytelling styles which pushed me into doing my own work.

G.: Your desire to have control over all phases of the production of your stories is legendary. You wanted to color them, ink them, letter them, everything them. Why would you want to do all this dogwork?

S.: Because I felt the stories would turn out stronger. They would acquire an entirely cohesive structure that can only arise from such a unified approach. Wouldn't *Collector's Dream* look better if you yourselves could do everything, such as the artwork, the printing and the covers, in addition to the writing, editing and typography? It's because only *you* know *exactly* what you want to see on the printed page.

I wrote books for Harvey Comics—Spyman, Gladiator, Magicmaster—in 1966. I would submit a script, the art would come back, and it would be a million miles away from what I had in mind. I *knew* I could do it better myself.

"The thing which interests me most is getting my ideas out, putting them down on paper, on TV, on film... And when I succeed in doing this, it can be the most satisfying thing in the world."

T. Frutti

One thing I *never* did was lettering.

I must confess that when I started in the business, I thought of myself as a pretty hotshot inker. But I felt really privileged to have men like Joe Sinnott and Frank Giacoia working on my material, because they improved it enormously. Both of them, of course, are excellent artists, and that's the reason why they make fantastic inkers. On the other hand, as far as coloring goes, I felt my books were being handled very badly. I'd do a facade of machinery, say a bank of computers receding a mile into the background, and it would come out colored in pinks, browns, greens! This is not *machinery*. Machinery is hard, cold; it needs to be done in metallic blue and chrome. So I'd just hit the roof when this insane kind of coloring would go on.

I remember the straw that broke the camel's back. I had drawn a double page spread in one of the *Strange Tales* sequences, featuring Nick Fury on trial by Baron Strucker and the agents of HYDRA. I had something like a hundred figures in the background, all individual figures. [*Ed. note:* Strange Tales *#156.*] I wrote a note to the colorist, Stan Goldberg, saying, "Stan, color all these men individually." Stan would probably put a sheet of blue over the whole thing, and that seemed criminal, because—although it might look good—after I had done all that work putting in all those figures, I didn't want them obliterated.

I took that story up to Marvel, and Stan looked at it and said, "I've had it, Steranko. Do it yourself. Take it away. I never want to see you again; just take the stuff away and color it yourself." So I started coloring all my material at that time, at $2.00 per page; later it went to $3.00 per page. I could only color about ten pages a day, so you can see I was losing a lot of money. I could have just been pencilling for two or three times as much; but the strip emerged a more perfect marriage of concepts as a result. So I was willing to take less money, by using that time to color and thereby make the story come out *better*.

G.: Do you find that, on the whole, strips which are done mainly by one person in as many different phases of production as possible turn out better than the ones in which a good inker would do the inking, a good penciller would do the pencilling, a good colorist would do the coloring, and so forth? Does unity generate a better strip than a division of labor?

S.: Not at all. There are probably as many guys in the business who produce bad work even when they are responsible for all the phases of production as when they are responsible for only one phase. In fact, since there are fewer people who are qualified in *all* the phases than in just one or two, it's a *lot* rarer to have a unified strip turn out better than a strip in which the labor is spread around. Wally Wood is a great penciller, a great inker and a great colorist; his stories turn out beautifully. But how many Wally Woods are there?

G.: And Will Eisner, I suppose, would fall into that category.

S.: I regard Wally Wood as head and shoulders above Will Eisner.

G.: Anyway, you left comics shortly thereafter—about a year and a half later, to be more specific—to start your own publishing empire. I understand this was because you felt that your work was being used to fill other people's pockets, and that as the publisher of your own material, it would be coming to you instead. Is money your primary motivation?

S.: Money is certainly a consideration, particularly these days when my expenses increase all the time. I have a staff to pay and extensive overhead. But I still have money-losing projects; the money-making ones pay for them. For example, there might be an artist whose work I really admire and would like to collect into a book. As a publisher, I have the power to do that, but if the book turns out to be a money-loser, I've got to make it up somewhere else. So I'm always interested in money coming in, because it pays for those kinds of projects. And naturally, I'm interested in getting the highest possible dollar for my own work.

G.: Many fans have taken issue with your publication *Mediascene*, which they see not as a magazine of information but as a running ad for your products. They feel that being half advertisements has in some way compromised its integrity.

S.: We have an *enormous* amount of integrity. *Integrity* is probably the wrong word to use in that context. *Mediascene* has always used the best paper, the best typography, the best layout, the best photographs, the best *everything*. We do not and never have cut corners on *Mediascene*.

In its early issues, *Mediascene* lost a tremendous amount of money, because I would *not* cut corners. It was very important to me to preserve its "integrity." *Mediascene* is like one of my children: It *must* stay alive, it must grow, it must thrive and it must mature. I think that because so much of my time and my life is tied up in *Mediascene*, I'm entitled to make a living from it, no matter what fans or critics might say about it. Anybody who thinks differently can go to hell.

As far as the content of *Mediascene* is concerned, of its 36 pages, approximately 20-22 are editorial. We present some of the most powerful graphics and some of the finest art, by some of the best artists in the profession. In *Mediascene* we give our readership exclusives in virtually every issue we print. We give them color, good, solid entertainment and as prime material as possible—things they simply cannot get anywhere else. Even our ads are the most entertaining and informative that can be found in any related publication. They are an integral part of the design of the magazine, good to look at, providing the maximum amount of information.

Tony Frutti: What is your circulation?

S.: It has varied from 6000 to 25,000, depending on the number of subscriptions, dealer orders and newsstand sales. The *topic* is very important to high sales.

G.: *Mediascene* does not seem generally available on the newsstands. Are you doing anything to correct this?

S.: We have taken newsstand tests with *Mediascene*, and I'm not certain that at this point it would be a good idea to go on the stands. The magazine market is very soft right now. You'll recall that about a year ago movie magazines which had been in business 20 or 30 years crashed, cancelled because nobody was buying them any more. Costs had risen, prices had risen to the point where the reading public didn't want to pay that much for that kind of entertainment. Now TV has taken over: It's so easy; you just sit there and get it. You don't have to go out to the stands any more, reach into your pocket and spend money.

G.: What is the reason you changed the title of *Mediascene* from *Comixscene*?

S.: Simply, *Comixscene* limited the scope of the publication. Even while it was *Comixscene* we covered paperbacks, films, pulps and any number of other non-comic material; the new title fit better.

Actually, we took a lot of flak for the title change, because many of our subscribers felt betrayed. They felt that our coverage of comics would be diluted. Of course, they were *not* betrayed. They were getting even more. I happen to be something of an authority on communication, and I'm interested in science fiction, in hero pulps, in certain kinds of paperbacks, in entertainers, and I think that the things that interest me also interest you and will interest them. A title like *Mediascene* best covers the field in which we all serve as fans.

Everything which finds its way into *Mediascene* is something I can justify *personally*. If I don't like a product, if I think the purchaser will not receive his money's worth, then I will not promote it through *Mediascene*. I can personally guarantee just about everything that appears on the pages of *Mediascene*; I believe in those products, I sell them, and I'm ready to back them up. Likewise the articles: I *enjoy* the topics that are covered. If I don't, then they simply do not get published.

G.: Tell me what you were trying to do with *Chandler*.

S.: Mainly, I was seeking to help a friend; that was my first thought. As you might know, Byron Preiss needed a book quickly because Ralph Reese was going to be

"It would take me six months to do Talon as a book."

T. Frutti

late with *Son of Sherlock Holmes*. Although I'm *not* the guy you call on when you have a book that's late and you need another to replace it, as a friend I wanted to do this book for Byron. That was my first consideration. My *second* consideration was the bucks. It wasn't a particularly big money job—though it could be if it gets reprinted in Europe and in the U.S. again, or if we make a record out of it, or if somebody buys the motion picture rights or something like that. But as far as I was concerned personally, as an artist, I wanted to recreate a hard-boiled thriller in the old Warner Bros. style—like *The Big Sleep* or RKO's *Murder My Sweet*. When I made the deal with Byron, I said, "If I can't come up with a new experimental format that works, I won't do the book, because I'm not interested in doing just another comic, another Nick Fury, Agent of SHIELD with balloons: the kind of thing *Schlomo Raven* turned out to be." *Schlomo* was just another comic book, only digest-sized, and I wasn't interested in that format for *Chandler*. Byron said, "Yes, I'll accept an experimental book." He was willing to take the chance. I delivered the format, and we were in business. The format adds greatly to the story, since it forces the reader into a measured rhythm, two illustrations to the page, every page, pacing the action very steadily.

G.: And what new and interesting publications will be forthcoming from Supergraphics?

S.: One in particular that I'd like to talk about is our *Cartoonists and Illustrators Portfolio*, a new catalogue of original art which we will have for sale. The first one is being published now [*Ed. note: The third issue is due soon.*]

T.: You will be selling your own original art?

S.: Not *necessarily* my own. There will be some Steranko pieces in the catalogue from time to time, naturally, but it will basically cover the work of other artists in the field.

G.: This will not be a copy of Russ Cochran's *Graphic Gallery*?

S.: Certainly not. The principal idea behind the catalogue is simply this: I collect original art, and have been for many years, and I don't particularly like the way it's being handled. There is a great deal of indiscriminate trading and pricing taking place, and what I'm attempting to do is educate and inform the people who buy original art. As an illustrator, painter and historian I believe I can deal in original art with more authority and expertise than anybody else in the business.

My approach is essentially this: When I buy a painting, say a Harold von Schmidt for $5000, I want to know the *history* of the work—I want to know *when* it was painted, *how* it was painted, *why* it was painted. I think I can deliver that, as an expert on comic art and illustration who has delved more deeply into its history than perhaps anybody else. Being an artist and illustrator myself, I know what goes into the artwork and I know the quality of artwork better than any other dealer in the country.

G.: Dealers are practically never artists in their own right, so this is certainly understandable.

S.: Exactly. I think people would rather buy art from me, especially if they are spending hundreds or thousands of dollars, because I know the quality of the pieces better than somebody just hawking them at a table.

I have some superb pieces for sale. For example, the first volume has a Robert McGinnis James Bond movie poster original painting, illustrations by Harold von Schmidt, Dean Cornwell, Winsor McCay, Jeff Jones, Peter Driben; mountains of quality material. We've had *Little Nemo*, *The Rarebit Fiend*, *Hungry Henrietta* and *Little Sammy Sneeze*. We've got Barry Smith pages. In short, we have a good, representative sampling of damn near everything that there is.

Perhaps most importantly, the prices are *fair*. They're not cheap—we're not giving material away—but they're not sky high by any means. They are fair: accurately priced to exactly what they should be in today's market.

G.: How is the *Encyclopedia of Comic Book Heroes* coming?

S.: I've said this before, and I'll say it again: I'm working on the books. I try to fit them in between the various other projects; maybe this fall I'll be able to wrap up the whole project, and get it out by Christmas time [*Ed. note: Well, maybe* **this** *Christmas ...*]. Frankly, it's an embarrassment to me that it has taken this long to get done, but I want to be able to guarantee the books to be good Supergraphics material. I *always* give people their money's worth, and I bend over backwards to give them quality material. I could have taken short cuts by pencilling the pieces and then giving them to somebody else to ink, but I'm just not interested in doing that. I considered that, when the pressure was really heavy; to get them finished but I think everyone would much rather see books which are *all* Steranko.

T.: What will be in them?

T Frutti

"We do not and never have cut corners on **Mediascene.**"

S.: Altogether, 150 Golden and Silver Age superheroes, three books of 50 heroes each. There will be a capsule history of each character and a full figure original drawing by myself. When I say original, I mean that they will not be copied from somewhere else, like covers. They will all be brand new figures, poses never—or hopefully never—seen before.

Q.: And Talon?

S.: Talon? The way I would want to see Talon done, as a book, would take me six months to complete, and right now I can't afford to take six months off. That would be six months without any money coming in, six months that I would be unable to fulfill my commitments on *Mediascene* and my other jobs. I'm still doing the covers for the Shadow paperbacks, and there are motion picture posters that must be taken care of. So it doesn't look as if I'll be getting around to doing Talon for quite a while. But I *will* get to it someday.

Another thing I'd like to do someday is a definitive Steranko portfolio. There is lots of material I've done which is unpublished, or published only in obscure fanzines or as commercial illustrations not normally seen by the general public. I'd probably include a long interview as well.

Q.: What kinds of things do you have in your personal collection?

S.: Generally books illustrated by Franklin Booth, Dean Cornwell, J.C. Leyendecker. I collect first editions; I was able to find a signed first edition Dashiell Hammett last year, which was a real find since Hammett signed virtually nothing. This one was signed to the publisher's assistant back in 1934. I also save what could be called "esoteric" comics, early pre-1940s comics, milestone issues, things like that. I probably have one of the most complete collections of Jack Kirby's comics in the country. I seek out favorite artists like Alex Toth, Al Williamson, Wally Wood too, of course.

T.: Do you still read newsstand comics?

S.: I still read Jack Kirby's books out of loyalty to Jack. I like his work and I read practically no other books on a regular basis. I just don't have the time to read any more. I work, quite literally, 15 to 18 hours a day, Saturdays, Sundays, holidays, all the time.

Q.: Except conventions ...

S.: *Especially* conventions! You think this is play? I'm *working*. Here I am, at twenty after four in the morning; this is *fun*? Convention work is spending long hours on your feet, talking, making deals, selling products.

But I'll tell you that the thing which interests me most is getting my ideas out, putting them down on paper, on TV, on film or whatever. And when I succeed in doing this, and it sells, it can be the most satisfying thing in the world. ■

T. Frutti

COMIC BOOKS

Low, low prices!

Send 50¢ for

buying and selling

lists. Alfred Lumsdaine,

4525 Panorama Drive,

Las Cruces, New Mexico

88001 USA

HOWDY, Y'ALL! MY NAME'S POP SYKE-- AN' I AIN'T GOT NOTHIN' TA SELL YA BUT YORESELVES!
YUP, THETS THE KEY TO HEALTH, WEALTH, AN' THE CONQUEST O' IMPURE HABITS--
--THE MAGIC OF SELF-OBSES-
EV'RY DAY, YA GOTTA TELL YORESELVES-- I'M DYNAMIC! I'M A WINNER! I'M CHARGED WITH EGO MAGNETISM!
I'M FULL OF POWER, BY CRACKY!
WELL, ALL RIGHT, I COULD TELL YA 'BOUT HOW OL' POP WENT FROM SELLIN' SHOES AT $2.10 AN HOUR--
--TO EARNIN' 2.5 MILLION LAST YEAR--!
OH, NUTS! RAIN.
LUCKILY I HAVE COME EQUIPPED.
© Jefferson Communications, Inc. 1978 Distributed by C T N Y N S
UNFORTUNATELY IT'S ONLY BIG ENOUGH FOR ONE OF US, AND, AS CADDY, I SHOULD GUARD AGAINST ANY WATER GETTING INTO YOUR NICE NEW GOLF BAG...
REMEMBER... LET ME KNOW IF ANY WATER GETS IN THERE
MADAM, I WISH YOU'D LEAVE! I'VE GOT A BUREAUCRACY TO RUN HERE.
OKAY. I'M GOING.
BUT BEFORE I GO I HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU...
ZAP
JUST CALL IT A GIFT FROM A CONCERNED TAXPAYER.
I HOPE YOU'RE NOT ASKIN' ME WHAT I THINK YOU ARE, MAN..
HOW, IS THAT GRATITUDE, LENNY? IS THAT GRATITUDE?
I RESCUED YOU FROM THE MOST DISMAL BALL CLUB IN THE LEAGUE! DON'T YOU THINK YOU MIGHT OWE ME A LITTLE FAVOR FROM TIME TO TIME?
BESIDES, IT'S NOT AS IF I'M ASKING YOU TO THROW GAMES, FOR GOD'S SAKE! IN FACT, I EXPECT YOU TO DO YOUR VERY BEST AT LEAST 95% OF THE TIME!
AND THE OTHER 5%?
DEPENDS ON THE SPREAD. I'LL LET YOU KNOW.
THIS HAIR DYE SHOULD MAKE ME A LOT YOUNGER LOOKING
ON THE OTHER HAND THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH STAYING DISTINGUISHED LOOKING
MY SPIDER POWER MEANS MORE NOW THAN EVER!
AUNT MAY'S LIFE DEPENDS ON IT!
HER PULSE WAS SO WEAK! IF I DON'T REACH THE HOSPITAL IN TIME--
NO! I WILL GET THERE IN TIME! I MUST! NO MATTER WHAT!

An Introduction To Collecting Newspaper Strips

by John Sech

To an outside observer, collecting newspaper comic strips must appear the easiest hobby in the world. The source material is certainly no trouble to find: each day virtually every daily newspaper (the *New York Times* is a key exception) carries one or more pages of potentially collectible material, while the weekend editions frequently have color comic inserts. So, provided that the editor in charge of the comic pages and sections has reading tastes similar to one's own, one should have no problems pursuing the hobby, right?

Wrong. If only things were as easy as they look! Collecting newspaper strips is probably the most *aggravating* area of comic collecting.

The reason is that over the past decade or so newspapers have come to suffer from an acute lack of space; if they are to survive, they must make every square inch of their pages count. Comic strips which are suspected to lack a readership (some of whom can be counted on to purchase the newspaper because it carries their favorite comic strips) are therefore subject to periodic "review": the editor simply drops the strip to see how many people write in protest. If the response is insufficient, the strip remains dropped, and the strip collector may never find out what happens to little Nell and Lewd Larry. For example, in the fall of 1972 the *Toronto Star* dropped the classic strip *Buzz Sawyer*. Complaints followed, but apparently not enough to reinstate it; the *Star* saw fit to return the strip long enough for the then current adventure to run its course, and as soon as Buzz said, "All's well," the strip was yanked permanently in favor of the gag strip *Kelly*.

On the other hand, the *Los Angeles Times* dropped the daily panel *Heathcliff* in June 1974; but several hundred complaints followed, and it was returned to the *Times'* pages. Within the first two days of the panel's return, over 100 people took the time to write or call the paper to thank them. It will certainly be a long time before *Heathcliff* is dropped from the *Times* comic page again.

Clearly, as long as the local newspaper sees fit to carry your favorite strips, you will have no real problems. But as can be seen from the preceding paragraphs, this happy state will not continue indefinitely; eventually, given enough time, *something* will happen to the strip of your choice. It may be an editorial review, it may be a postal strike delaying the week's shipment of the strip from the syndicate, it may be editorial censorship or it may be the kind of production error which causes the same week's strips to run two weeks in a row. (Another example: the *Toronto Star* for several years has failed to carry the Saturday *Wizard of Id*, although it has no trouble carrying the other five dailies and the Sunday.) What can one do to ensure not losing any day to day continuity?

One could sigh and forget the strip. But it is frequently not necessary to get this drastic. If one newspaper in a city drops a strip, another local newspaper often steps in to take over. One could subscribe to an out of town paper, but these years newspaper subscriptions tend to run on the high side: $50 per year or more, with price increases in addition depending on the distance the subscriber is from the city of publication. These are large sums of money to pay for just one or two comic strips, and some strip collectors might have to subscribe to *several* out of town papers to get all their favorites. And nobody guarantees that the Postal System will deliver the newspapers in any case.

Collections of newspaper strips reprinted in paperbacks (for example, the Hyperion Press series or the Fawcett reprints) are an inexpensive way to obtain hard to find strips or to fill in the occasional inevitable gap. However, such collections are rarely complete. In the case of continuity strips, in which the action progresses from day to day, this is (surprisingly) not a major problem, since part of each strip is usually devoted to a recap of the previous day's event. Missing a daily of a gag strip (just a joke without any real relationship to the jokes of the days before) is more serious, because there is generally no way to reconstruct the missing strip from the ones on the day before or the day after.

The only real solution to the missing strips problem is for strip collectors in different cities to get together to set up trades, which has the very desirable effect of not noticably increasing the collecting budget. But such arrangements are not too frequent, since strip collectors are not as well organized as other facets of fandom. [*Ed. note: Advertise for newspaper strip trades in our Shop-By-Mail section!*]

Access to strips is just one of the problems of newspaper strip collecting. Strip storage and display is another. Unless one lives in a warehouse, keeping entire comic pages rapidly becomes impractical; they accumulate astonishingly quickly at one page (not to mention more) per day. The solution is to cut the desired strips out of the comic pages for individual storage. But this itself creates another problem, exacerbated by the recent trends to squeeze as much copy into as little newspaper as possible.

Take a minute to scan a newspaper comic page; notice how close together the various strips are printed. Newspapers which provide sufficient margin around each strip are becoming very rare in these days of economic pinch, and it takes a deft hand to separate comic strips which are printed adjacent to one another without cutting into the artwork of one or the other strip. Of course, margins are not absolutely necessary; but any wear and tear on a strip generally starts at the edge. A good margin prevents this wear and tear from touching the image area, some-

© 1978 John Sech

FIGHTING THAT SUPER-POWERED INTRUDER IN THE CHEMOTHERAPY LAB IS MORE LIKE A JOB FOR SUPERMAN--BUT HE'S NEEDED ELSEWHERE!
SO IT'S UP TO BATMAN AND ROBIN!
MEANWHILE...
I CAN'T TREAT FLASH UNLESS I CAN DIAGNOSE THE NATURE OF HIS INJURY...
EVERY X-RAY MACHINE IN THIS HOSPITAL HAS VANISHED!
MY SPIDER SPEED MAKES THEIR ATTACK SEEM LIKE SLOW MOTION TO ME!
HEY! HOLD ON TO 'IM!
BUT I DAREN'T MOVE TOO FAST!
LAND SAKES! WHAT'S ALL THE COMMO--?
PETER!
OH MO! I CAN'T LET HER SEE ME TAKE THESE THREE!
AVAUNT, LADY! IT'S DANGEROUS IN THE HALLWAY!
A BODY AIN'T SAFE NOWADAYS!
YEAH, ALL THE UNCANNY CHAR
YOU, TOO, PUNK! MOVE!
OTHERWISE, YOU'D GLADLY ATTEND HIS LECTURE NEXT WEEK.
Steve Gerber and Gene Colan
I'LL YOU
WORLD--!
I'D LIKE TO ORDER A LARGE PIZZA....DO YOU DELIVER?...
SHOE SALESMAN.
IT'S HIS KICK YOU GOTTA WATCH OUT FOR
POW

"Laziness is not an asset to collecting comic strips."

thing which certainly enhances the strips' trade- or salability should you ever decide to change your collecting tastes.

Newspapers which have more than one comic page sometimes—just out of sheer cussedness—will print two pages back to back ("split format", as distinguished from "twin format" on facing pages). If this occurs, one can almost count on having one's two favorite strips printed in such a way that trimming one will mutilate the other (Murphy's Law of Comic Strip Collecting). This makes it necessary to purchase two copies of the newspaper or to make xeroxes, either of which adds to one's expenses.

Storing trimmed daily strips is itself sometimes a problem. One popular method of storage involves using coin sleeves or coin envelopes, which are made of clear plastic and can be bound in three ring binders for display; but they are expensive, and saving several years' worth of a daily strip could run into a fair amount of money. Some people like to construct little book jackets from cardboard and, using glue, make their own paperback books out of a daily strip run. But the simplest and cheapest storage method is probably the #10 business envelope. There is plenty of room in such an envelope to store at least half a year's worth of dailies, and the blank face of the envelope provides ample space for a label including the strip's title and the dates. Sunday strips, on the other hand, come in a bewildering variety of formats (collecting Sundays in a uniform format is often almost impossible because newspaper editors might rearrange, trim or delete panels without warning, in order to include "just one more ad") and are generally too large to be stored in #10 envelopes. Appropriately-sized manila envelopes, with or without cardboard inserts for stiffening, are perhaps the most usual solution. In any case, strips which are being put away in storage should never be folded; a fold significantly weakens the paper and could cause the strip to break apart.

Laziness is not an asset to collecting comic strips. A few minutes of each day should be set aside to trim the day's strips out of the newpapers. Unless you collect only one or two strips, putting off the trimming is like playing with fire: Before you know it, you will be neck deep in strips and confronted with the boring prospect of having to trim them all at once. Mistakes in filing can creep in as well, particularly when the newspaper production department mislabels a daily strip and one is in a rush to get the trimming finished. One could easily fail to notice that the day's *Broomhilda* is actually *Mary Worth*, which would result in an unknown gap in one's run of either strip. Such an unnoticed gap is particularly likely if one has enlisted the aid of a friend (who just follows the labels) in the cutting and trimming process.

Newspaper strips are an often-neglected aspect of comic collecting, and building a newspaper strip collection is a challenging and rewarding pastime. The newspaper strip is far more often an accurate mirror of contemporary society than any kind of comic, being printed only a few weeks (rather than months) after being drawn. (*Doonesbury* was buried in snow well before last winter's big blizzard hit Buffalo.) Do not enter newspaper strip collecting half-heartedly; it is a hobby which takes work and patience in considerable amounts. ■

John E. Sech
Route 4, Box 4-23
Canters Cave Township Road 223
Jackson, Ohio 45640

WE MET BYRON CARY PREISS IN SAN DIEGO IN 1977, JUST AFTER HIS PARTICIPATION IN A PANEL ON THE "FUTURE OF COMICS." HE IS A GRADUATE OF THE STANFORD UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION, IS IN HIS LATE TWENTIES, AND HAS CONSIDERABLE COMMAND OF THE JARGON OF THE MEDIA. THE IMMEDIACY AND RELEVANCE OF HIS COMMENTS INSPIRED US TO OBTAIN A COLLECTOR'S DREAM INTERVIEW IN WHICH WE HOPED SOME OF THESE WOULD EMERGE AND SEE PRINT, AND THEY DID. ALSO, IT WAS OUR UNABASHED INTENTION TO PLUG HIS VARIOUS PUBLICATIONS WHICH ARE AMONGST THE MOST VISUALLY AND LITERARILY INTERESTING BOOKS IN THE FANTASY GENRE. HIS WEIRD HEROES SERIES (STALLED AFTER EIGHT BOOKS BUT SCHEDULED TO REAPPEAR AS I, ALIEN, PUBLISHED BY GROSSET & DUNLAP THIS FALL) BRINGS BACK THE FLAVOR OF THE PULPS OF THE 1930s, WITH HEROES REFLECTING THE STORYTELLING SOPHISTICATION OF THE 1970s, IN MODERN PAPERBACK BINDINGS. THE BEST-SELLING ILLUSTRATED ROGER ZELAZNY WILL BE JOINED BY AN ILLUSTRATED HARLAN ELLISON VOLUME, SHOWCASING AN ENTIRE SPECTRUM OF ART FROM SOME OF COMICDOM'S BEST-KNOWN NAMES, THE HOWARD CHAYKIN/SAMUEL R. DELANEY OPUS EMPIRE AND CHAYKIN'S ADAPTATION OF ALFRED BESTER'S THE STARS MY DESTINATION, ONE OF THE MOST PROFOUND SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS EVER PUBLISHED. A COMPLETE SET OF BYRON PREISS VISUAL PUBLICATIONS SHOULD BE PART OF EVERYFAN'S COMIC LIBRARY.

COLLECTOR'S DREAM INTERVIEW

WITH BYRON PREISS

George Olshevsky: Byron, tell us where Visual Publications is headed and what you are involved in right now.

Byron Preiss: At present, we are producing two major books. First, there is a new visual novel in full process color by Howie Chaykin and Samuel R. Delany—a science fiction novel which represents a major step forward for comics. [*Ed. Note: It is titled* Empire*; coming this fall.*] It draws upon sophisticated concepts which are ordinarily filtered out or watered down in the more usual comic media. Probably it will be the same size and format as the Fiction Illustrated books, though not necessarily in that series. The other book we are currently working on is a big book for us, a hardcover collection of work by Gray Morrow, of which 60 pages will be in color and 40 or so will be in black and white. It is called *The Illustrated Roger Zelazny*; we have four or five of Roger's best stories —"A Rose For Ecclesiastes," "The Doors of His Face, the Lamps of His Mouth," "Rock Collector," "The Furies" among others—together with a new 23 page story written especially for us featuring his character Jack or Shadows. There will be a set of murals based on Corwin and the Amber World. It should be available about January 1978 [*Ed. Note: Indeed it is available, as a Baronet Book, $8.95 in soft cover or $14.95 in hardcover, from Baronet Publishing Company, 509 Madison Avenue, New York City; add 95¢ postage per book. It is stunning. End of plug.*]. The nice thing about the Zelazny book is that we are doing each story in a different manner. Gray is using all his illustration techniques, many of which never get into the comics because they are not line techniques.

As for the Weird Heroes series, we began that in 1974 to develop some new heroes for the 1970s, to see if we could avoid the violence which seemed to be the reason for the existence of most of the mass media characters. We got in touch with people like Philip Jose Farmer and Archie Goodwin, who are pretty well known for their characters and heroes. Archie came up with someone called Adam Stalker, a Viet Nam veteran with a compulsion to hunt—not a nonviolent concept in itself, but handled in a negative fashion, which was something different. I came up with a hero called Guts, a Jewish greaser from the future living in the present, which went over well with about six or seven people. We did a character named Rose, who was a woman living in Miami, Florida, with a husband with heart trouble—that was the weirdest hero we have ever published. Phil Farmer created Greatheart Silver, a Zeppelin captain of the future. That series has proved quite popular; we have done three of them so far: "Showdown At Shootout," "The Return of Greatheart Silver, or the Secret Life of Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," and "The First Command, or Inglories Galore." And we have brought back both Kenneth Robeson and Maxwell Grant, the authors of Doc Savage and the Shadow, as characters in their own stories. These start in *Weird Heroes* #8.

We wanted to get exposure for comics illustrators outside of the comic media, and in the course of the eight books in the Weird Heroes series, we have presented Craig Russell, Jim Steranko, Neal Adams, Alfredo Alcala, Alex Nino (extensively), Steve Fabian, Steve Hickman, Jeff Jones, Dave Sheridan (a good underground cartoonist) and many others. Rudy Nebres did an entire book, *Nightshade*; Ralph Reese did some beautiful work; Esteban Maroto did some plates for Steve Englehart's "Viva," which was about an ex-hooker turned jungle girl—one of our more exotic efforts. Ted White created a character who flooded his house and then burned it down. Marv Wolfman picked up on Doc Phoenix and wrote a novel, *The Oz Encounter*, about a little girl who imagines herself in the land of Oz; Jeff Jones did the cover. Basically, we think the series has developed a pretty interesting cast, characters you do not often see in regular comics.

Beyond gaining exposure for people who do not ordinarily get it in the book world, we want to get illustrations from

Illustration by Franc Reyes

© 1978 Byron C. Preiss

artists who have not really had a chance to do work outside the comics. Alex Nino had made use of that freedom, for example; the stuff he did for us in *Weird Heroes* #7 is all craftint, which is something new for him. Steve Hickman did what I consider to be one of his best paintings for the cover of #8 illustrating Kamus of Kadizhar, a detective in the old hardboiled tradition, who wears a trenchcoat but has to fight demons. So far we have published "The Big Spell" and "The Maltese Vulcan," both by J. Michael Reaves, in that series, and we have "Shadow Night" and "The Dark Lord Slept Late" in the works.

The most experimental thing we have done to date has been Steranko's *Chandler*. It was conceived to develop a new graphic system, a new graphic language. That is something we have wanted to do for a while, and we will be taking it a step further with Howie Chaykin's book. There are thousands of ways to tell a story in pictures and words, but most of the ways to date—with a few notable exceptions—have been unsophisticated. We want the format to work on a level to that of films and books. Our new material does that.

G.: You must experience a fair amount of production difficulty, what with pictures and text in the same place, on the same page. That's a hell of a lot of work for a publisher to take on.

B.: We have attempted almost everything, production-wise, things we should not have done and things we should be learning from. Shlomo Raven, which was *Fiction Illustrated* #1, was lettered entirely by Kenneth Smith. It was a very interesting stylistic lettering, but nobody could read it because the printing blurred it. The book was funny nonetheless—*especially* since you could not read it. *Starfawn* was a book we did on newsprint which we wanted to do on really fine paper. Steve Fabian works with a stipple-type board with a Venus pencil, which gives a three dimensional effect, and we had Marie Severin color the book. What she wound up with was an actual moulding on a flat comics page; it does not look like a comic page any more. But there are enormous production problems with World Color Press when we go to them with a book like that.

G.: Tell us about World Color Press.

B.: World Color Press is like a guillotine. You send work out and you get it back, and it *looks* like something you sent out but you can never be sure. World Color Press is not a bad house. They do things cheaply and fast; that's why people use them. Unfortunately, when you want to do works of art or something that people would call a book, they do not do that very well. The speed at which the presses run and the quality control are such that you almost always wind up with muddy material, whether it can be helped or not. The type we used on *Starfawn* was 9 point Avant Garde Book Weight, a very expensive type but a very nice type. But because of the printing quality, the type blurred and people could not read the book.

Chemical Color tried very hard to maintain some standards on the separations. Chemical Color is now owned by World Color Press, and is composed of about 50 women sitting in chairs stripping comics. There are four overlays for each color—solid (100%), 75%, 50% and 25%—multiplied by four colors, multiplied by 128 pages, so there is an enormous amount of handwork to be done. They draw each set of overlays for each set of colors, screen them and develop the plates. Well, when you get, say, 500 color corrections on a 128 page book, with three days to do it, you cannot expect perfection. Ralph Reese and I sat down to proof 100 pages of color in four days for *Son of Sherlock Holmes*. It was a nightmare: there are things in that book like purple skin or tan skin. Those people really tried, but we found we just had to go to process color, and that has caused enormous problems because of the cost involved in doing mechanical separations.

It is difficult to get through to a publisher when you are asking him to spend $30,000, and I've spent very long, hard hours trying to convince publishers to do these kinds of things.

I once tried to get promotion for a book called *One Day Affair*, which was a collection of comics from *National Lampoon*. They wanted to spend $500 to $700 on promotion—that's all—because that was all they could afford to do. So they made a nice little box, with a picture of the characters Steve and Jill

"ONE OF STAN LEE'S GREATEST SUCCESSES WAS THAT HE ACKNOWLEDGED COMICS AS SOMETHING WITH WHICH HE COULD TALK TO PEOPLE AND NOT JUST ENTERTAIN."

Illustration by Steven Hickman 1978 Byron Preiss Visual Publications Inc.

Kamus of Kadizhar, cover art for Weird Heroes *#8, for a story by J. Michael Reaves*

on top of it, with Steve saying, "Where have you been all of my life?" and Jill saying, "Away." It was clever; we bought it. It was a nice package and it was put on the counters of book stores. Unfortunately, that's pretty much where the book was read—in the book stores. Actually, that's not quite true; they sold a fair number of them. But we ran into the problem where they would not spend even the money to take out an ad in

T. Frutti

"BASICALLY, MARVEL'S CONTRIBUTION WAS TO OPEN UP THE COMMERCIAL MARKET."

National Lampoon itself! Why? Because it was $1000 or $2000 for an ad, and that was considered by them to be too much of an up-front investment in a new type of book. We ran into that very often: The initial promotion investment is not made, and then the reaction is not on the level they expect partly ***because*** that initial promotion investment was not made.

Ballantine's stuff sells so well because they make that commitment. *Sword of Shannara* had a $25,000 promotion on it. If Chandler had had the same kind of promotion, it would have done a hell of a lot better than it did—and it did not do badly, either.

Pyramid now has a new sales force that is attempting to reach new markets. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, who owns Pyramid, looks at what we have, and they say, "Oh, this is old comics," or fancy comics, or whatever. It is a new medium that needs a commitment from the house, and it is very hard to develop that commitment.

To the extent that the Fiction Illustrated books have been reviewed on an equal footing with other books, we have certainly succeeded with our new format. The *New York Times* recently did reviews of four mystery books, and we were one of them. Ellery Queen did reviews of forthcoming books, and we were one of those. It is really the first time straight periodicals are looking at comics and graphic stories on an equal level with regular books. Now, the *Times* did not like the book; but Ellery Queen *did*, and that was good. The potential is there, the recognition is there; certainly the audience is growing.

Tony Frutti: You mentioned that your new style of comic book is "different." Can you explain the difference between your publications and ordinary comics? What is *wrong* with comics that needs changing, anyway?

B.: There is nothing much the matter with comics as we know them, except that many of them are mediocre. I do not mean mediocre in the bad sense; I mean mediocre in that they are just turned out. The books are *produced*, not really written or drawn. There are people like Len Wein and Doug Moench, who really care about what they are doing no matter what it is, and you can usually get a good book out of them. But when you're talking about five scripts a month for characters who happen to have existed for years and have to be sustained, the quality certainly falls off.

A long time ago, in the creation of Superman by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, there was the desire on their part to create a hero that would reflect the ultimate man in the eyes of the people of the time. But I doubt whether they said they wanted to show existentially or any other way what a Superman should or would be. It was more a question of Jerry and Joe reading Edmond Hamilton's stories and Hugo Gernsback's pulps and saying, "Wow! This stuff is great! Wouldn't it be terrific if we could do something like Buck Rogers, and develop some of the things we've read about?" Do either of you know Artie Spiegelman's work?

G & T.: No.

B.: Neither of you know Artie Spiegelman's work. This is something which I guess is common to about 90% of comic fandom. He did a little work in *Witzend* and then went into the undergrounds. He has done work on *Arcade*, for example. He said that comics are an art form, in which the panel is a certain device, the word balloon is a certain device, and that along with the medium come certain conventions which people have learned in order to interpret the stories they read. The question is how can these conventions be restructured or redeveloped, how can you teach people to relearn the visual responses they have towards comics. These are extremely important things to take into account if you want to talk about the medium going anywhere, where comics are going to be in fifty years. The 17 page books like *Ms. Marvel* for 11 or 12 year olds are not what the future of comics is all about. They serve their purpose, but the purpose is not to advance the medium.

G.: There certainly is a lamentable dearth of adult material in the field.

B.: There is a dearth of *adolescent* material! Who reads *Ms. Marvel*, anyway? There is an integrity in Marvel Comics that you can point at and say it deserves respect, but why bother doing something like *Ms. Marvel*?

G.: As initially conceived, I could not see the character as being viable.

B.: It's a commercial concept, not a character concept; which is why the original Marvel characters have endured, and why so many of the newer ones have flopped. Howard the Duck was done as a character, and was done because there was a real enthusiasm behind it, and it's probably a good deal of the reason he has been more successful than some of the others. We will see what happens when the enthusiasm wanes a little.

So you see, it *can* be done.

A lot of people have transcended the medium: Jim Steranko, Paul Gulacy at times; Jim Starlin has run off in his own direction, and I'm very surprised at what Steve Gerber had gotten away with in the context of the industry. Comics of the late 1950s and of the early Marvel Age up to about 1969 were clear and direct in their statements. National blew their big chance in the late 1960s; they had Jack Kirby's best work, they had Nick Cardy's best work, they had Sergio writing and Ditko's best work (if not his best work ever). They had Howard Post, who is excellent. Joe Kubert and Alex Nino are two artists who are almost incapable of drawing something uninteresting, and they were at National. So was Alex Toth. But they had trouble *pulling* together. Partly, I suppose, it was only a half-commitment from Carmine, who would go a certain extent and then get worried, perhaps because of competition from Marvel, which was then incredibly popular.

Marvel's contribution was basically to open up the market commercially, so that you can at least walk into the offices of a major publisher and have them acknowledge that there is an audience for comics in book form. This is largely

due to Stan Lee, who has sold something like 90,000 books for Simon and Schuster.

Our books are different in that we are not looking to repeat formulas, but rather to do each book on an individual basis. One reason there is no *Starfawn* #2 is because it is repeating *Starfawn* #1. We want books with innovation, a new type of storytelling. That's where a book like *Bloodstar* misses. It is just really comics, set with type. Richard Corben's work is just so marvelous, but it really was not designed as a book. It was important in what it did, but not in terms of advancing the medium.

Comics are graphic stories, which means historically and artistically you combine pictures and words to tell a story. The language of comics is many things; you can use type to tell your story, and pictures, and when you put the two together there are hundreds of thousands of ways to do it. We are trying to show that you can take a concept, say, Information Means Power, express it visually over 120 pages in such a way that the information contained therein is as potent and artistically solid as if it were a 120 page novel. This is something comics have never really done.

G.: That's correct. Most of what happens in the 17 or so pages of a typical comic book adds up to only a couple of pages of prose. Do you think there is hope for the medium in a magazine like *Heavy Metal*?

B.: *Heavy Metal* is locked into a problem of having to use material which they bought and are buying from France—some of it very good, some of it very bad. Perhaps not very *bad*, just not very interesting. Ralph Reese calls them a bunch of doodlers. Most of the scripts are good, and some of the illustrations are even marvellous. Last May (1977) I spent about a week and a half in France, meeting the French cartoonist Jean Giraud—Moebius—who did Arzach and Jerry Cornelius. Jerry Cornelius is, in terms of the amount of line used, just incredible even compared to Arzach and Lieutenant Blueberry.

Heavy Metal has a market of 200,000 people who regularly buy a magazine featuring nothing but graphic stories dealing in fantasy. This is extremely important because it is the first collection of material that has proved that somebody will spend so many dollars a year for this type of work. The more publishers that become convinced of this, the more such material we're going to be seeing. A few years ago *Rolling Stone* commissioned an American artist living in England to do sort of an apocalyptic, climatic fantasy. It was very sexual and very terrible in its visuals, but it was a very sophisticated graphic story. They were going to publish it through Straight Arrow books, their press. Unfortunately, Straight Arrow folded; but

COLLECTOR'S DREAM CLASSIFIED

WANTED

Wanted: Dinosaur books, preferably well illustrated and on an adult level. Also back issues of SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN before 1961. George Olshevsky, P.O. Box 127, Stn. T, Toronto, Ont. Can. M6B 3Z9.

Wanted: MARVEL MYSTERY #31, 37, 44, 46, 86, 91. CAPTAIN AMERICA #31, 32, 37, 41, 69, 70, 73, 76. HUMAN TORCH #14, 18, 31, 32, 33. SUB-MARINER #29, 31. **Also wanted:** OLD GIRLIE MAGAZINES from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s: BEAUTY PARADE, EYEFUL, FLIRT, SHOWGIRLS, TITTER, WINK, WHISPER. BIZARRE #1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 18, 20. All mags must be in nice shape. Tony Frutti, 1285 St. Clair Ave. W. Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6E 1B8.

Wanted: Early BATMAN, SUPERMAN, F.F., AVENGERS, SILVER SURFER. Send list with price and condition to: Andy Dunn, 221 Eagle St., Newmarket, Ont. I also sell, trade.

Wanted: ACTION COMICS #170-210 in MINT condition. Paying DOUBLE price guide. Write first. George Foo, 104 Kendall Rd., Kendall Park, NJ 08824

Wanted: SPIDER-MAN #1 in good condition. Paying $100. Send descriptions to: Andrew Rutenberg, 161 Earl, Kingston, Ont. K7L 2H3

Wanted: Pre-1970 Disneyland park maps and Guidebooks. Send prices and descriptions to: James Shull, 5503 Tilden Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91401.

Wanted: AVENGERS #1-4 in vg+. **For Sale:** Over 1000 Marvels. Send SASE, want list to: Georges Turgeon, 2095 Meadowbrook #4, Burlington, ONT. L7P 2A5.

Wanted: Back issues of RBCC, BAT—MANIA, LEGION OUTPOST, AWODCC, and STARLOG. State price and condition. Lang Thompson, 424 College St., Troy, AL 36081.

Wanted: Fanzines, especially: INSIDE COMICS, pre-37 COMICS JOURNAL, Barks articles, pre-13 FOOM, COMPASS. Also want many SCROOGE #100-160. Mike Saunders, 14922 Bassett, Van Nuys, CA 91405.

Wanted: Pre-1960s sports comics. Also buy, sell, trade Marvels. Outrageously fair prices. Send want list to: Clay Schurman, P.O. Box 5251, Santa Barbara, CA 93108.

Wanted: Harvey Comics 1938-58, Abbott & Costello (Drucker issues), Fox & Crow, Herbie. Dan Walent, P.O. Box 14596, Orlando, FL. 32857.

Wanted: Philip Jose Farmer—1st edition hardcovers, Essex House and Beacon Novels. U. Alfred Silke, Box 2000, Yellowknife, NWT. X0E 1H0.

the work and the interest are there. Jack Katz' *First Kingdom* series sale to Wallaby is very important in that it will have a ripple effect if it sells well. Even *Sword of Shannara* with its few illustrations.

G.: I found the Hildebrand illustrations in *Sword of Shannara* to be excellent, but the book itself read very badly, like a first draft of a fantasy novel. This annoyed me no end, as I expected to be swept off my feet like I was with *Lord of the Rings* and I wasn't.

B.: There is so little of that stuff around. People pick it up because that's all we've got. It is the same with our books. Our books sell because they're good, but also because there is nothing else in the field. If three people had done *Son of Sherlock Holmes*, there might well have been one better than ours and people would have bought that one instead. But there *is* no other *Son of Sherlock Holmes*. Hopefully, the field will develop in the future.

T.: How do you treat your artists? Do they receive a piece of the action, a percentage of the sales?

B.: Of course!

G.: How much freedom are they given in terms of doing what they want to do?

B.: In terms of the illustrations, a lot of freedom. For example, when Howie Chaykin composes for Marvel, he has to cater to a certain direct visual style which Marvel has for all the books. On the other hand, I let him experiment with technique—not only do I let him, but he would *insist* on it, something he cannot do at other comics companies.

It is not my feeling that comics must in their purest form be produced by one person. That's like saying a motion picture can only be a pure motion picture if it's written, edited, produced and directed by the same individual. That is why we can work with Doug Moench and Alex Nino and myself together, and come up with something that is really *one* work, not three little works combined.

G.: Tell us about some of the artists.

B.: Tom Sutton is an artist who is rarely exposed and rarely used as much as he should be. Tom is very funny, and he can tell a story graphically in fascinating ways. He can do an Eisner-style almost as fast as he can do a Wrightson-style; he is a bit sloppy in his inking, but his pencilling and storytelling are marvellous.

Steve Fabian is in his forties. He quit being a commercial engineer in his thirties and said, "I'm going to become a full-time artist." He is married, has four kids and a house. So that was a major commitment: he just up and moved to New Jersey to become a commercial artist. His work is very interesting, somewhat evocative of foreign-type pulp illustrations. He has gotten much stronger in his anatomy. He likes comics and I would be interested in working with him again.

G.: And Steranko?

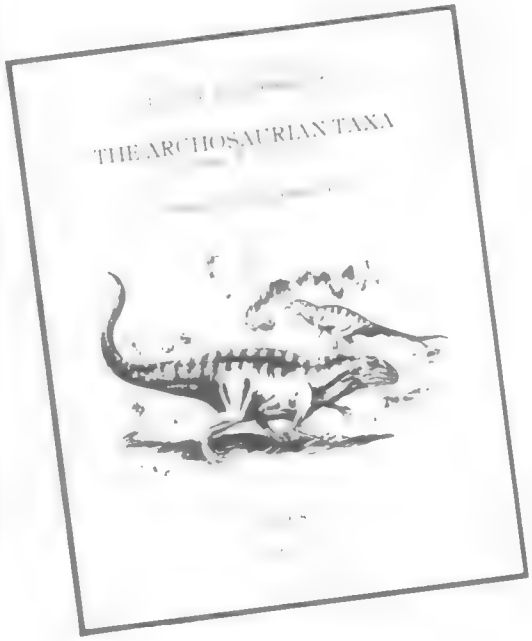
B.: Jim Steranko is probably one of the most important figures ever to work in this field. He is concerned with the way comics deal with time, with the way comics are structured graphically. He is concerned with the basic nature of the form, which is something Buscema is not really interested in, and Kirby is interested in only in the sense of how it might better help him in telling a story. Only a handful of people have ever dealt with those questions—Neal Adams has, and Stan Lee dealt with comics as a social medium. One of Lee's great successes was the fact that he acknowledged comics as something with which he could talk to people and not just entertain.

On the other hand, Jim is not completely satisfied with the work he has done for us. He would rather have had more time to work on the art. We had head shots in there that neither of us wanted, but which had to go in if the book were to go to press on time. Jim turned out *Chandler* mostly working within a period of three months. He would send me stuff on a bus from Reading; I must have gone to the 42nd Street terminal twenty times on *Chandler*.

G.: How did you decide on a format for *Chandler*?

B.: I had to go to Reading to talk to him. The book featured two panels on each page, with a column of type under each panel, for 120 pages. The reason for that was that he wanted to set up a *structure*. When you do a novel, you know that it is going to be printed in upper and lower case type, on 8½ × 11 or 7 × 9 or 4 × 5 inch pages over a certain number of pages. You don't achieve your effect by printing the violent scenes in red letters and the love scenes in italics; you get it by doing things with the English language. That is what Jim was showing when he did *Chandler*. He said, "This is going to be my form, two panels on a page, text underneath. Within that structure will lie all the characterizations of my story." That was the important thing; he did not rely on the panel, he did not rely on any convention of comics, but he relied on the art and the story working together without using gimmicks like little panels for head shots, big panels for panoramas and panels with jagged edges for action. We were looking to say that the primary impact of comics is through the interrelationship of pictures and words, that gimmicks were a stage we had to go through to arrive where we are today. Composition is an important artistic tool—to do down shots and long shots, close-ups for emphasis, medium shots for establishing relationships between people are important things, but they are not in and of themselves the result of a large panel or a small panel. They

ANNOUNCING *MESOZOIC MEANDERINGS* #1



FIRST TIME EVER!
A complete index to all the world's DINOSAURS and related reptiles of the Mesozoic Era. Hundreds of genera and thousands of species classified, the result of eight years of research. A tool for the serious student of Vertebrate Paleontology.

Order from:
Mesozoic Meanderings
c/o G&T Enterprises
P. O. Box 127 Station T
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M6B 3Z9

Price: $1.50 + 50¢ postage

Please make all checks payable to George Olshevsky

are important because of what is being drawn.

In terms of word balloons, we *are* using word balloons, but they will not look like the word balloons people are used to seeing.

G.: One of the things I found very distracting about *Chandler* was having to read the text in one place and look at the picture in another. My eye has to make two motions, and the picture is not talking to me.

B.: We are very conscious of the narrative properties inherent in the placement of type, so you'll be seeing some things from us in the future which have never been done before.

G.: Tell us something of how you got started in the field, the origin of Byron Preiss. Did you start out as a fan, one of those guys who followed comics with dedication?

B.: My little shady past of sitting in delicatessens and reading *SHIELD* exists. I read Mark Hanerfield's *Comic Reader*, and I used to call him up to ask him how I could get in touch with Jim Steranko. I'd tell him how much I liked Steranko's work, and Mark would be very nice and talk to me for two hours but never gave me Jim's number. We finally got together, of course, and we developed a comic book called *The Block*, which was an attempt to do in tabloid form a comic book about drug addiction. It was successful where it was used; we distributed it in Philadelphia, and it had a lot of impact with the children.

G.: I remember when Jim was in Toronto for the first Cosmicon, that he was concerned with it getting proper distribution.

B.: We had a good deal of trouble with it. It was a question of making inroads with something new and different. It transcended race and age, even though it was mostly about black teenagers. It made a statement about drug addiction and did not turn away from the graphic story form. It was one of the first things we ever did.

G.: Was it well received?

B.: Critically, it was extremely well received. Percy Sutton liked it; Jesse Jackson liked it. Mrs. Humphrey—the late Hubert Humphrey's wife—who was always very active in education liked it. Pharmaceutical Manufacturing sent us a letter, and I even got a job with the Children's Television Workshop partly as a result of *The Block*.

But, now I have an agent in New York who is very good. They represent people like Jimmy Breslin and Erica Jong, and when I have trouble with a company that is not paying me or is withholding on a promotional obligation, if a company messes around with me, then that company is going to have trouble with Erica Jong or whoever else they might have under contract. And this is something that has been rare for someone who produces comic books—exactly what we've been talking about in terms of developing respectability.

G.: Did you ever work for the comics, like Marvel and DC?

B.: I was working in the business during late 1960s, when Neal Adams was just gaining his cult, and Jim Steranko had just come off doing the SHIELD stories. The *Tower of Shadows* story he did then, incidentally, is one of the most important stories to have been done at the time. Mainly I was into special projects, not mainline comic stuff. I remember discussing the importance of doing the paperback collections of the Green Lantern/Green Arrow stories for the college market with Carmine Infantino and Fred Cahill. They did them; the covers were not good and they did not sell very well, but they did them nevertheless. One thing we wanted to do was choose an artist's best work and publish it in an oversize edition.

At National I was made director of this thing for which we coined the name Edugraphics, a comics education program based on existing comics. It really developed into something interesting, but for personal reasons I'm not going to explain what has happened since then.

G.: Can you elaborate on why you would want to go to a major publisher? Do they pay well, for example?

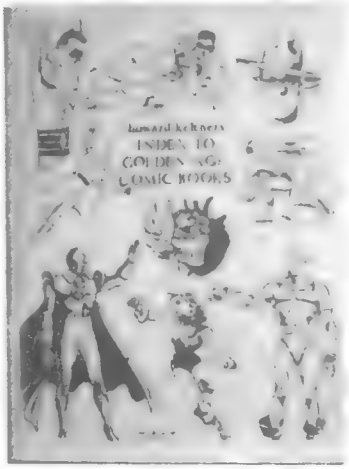
B.: Certainly they do.

G.: What I'm after is the reason you don't publish your work yourself ...

B.: Most people in this medium who have intended to publish themselves have not done well. The only person who has done really well that I know of, and it was with a really fine product, was Steranko with his *History of Comics*. Even he worked through another organization and went through a lot of grief to get his money until things finally were straightened out with Crown. You've got to invest a lot of money up front, you've got to set up your own distribution systems, and you've got to get the recognition of the medium. To say that Harcourt Brace Jovanovich has published comics is a step forward for the medium, because that is saying that a major publishing house will commit themselves to doing comics. But to publish myself would mean, well, here's this guy who loves comics just like all the other guys who love comics ... Do you see the difference? Armand Eisen did a book called *Ariel*, invested a fortune in doing it. His chances of making money are extremely limited, as nice as the product may be. Mainly what you wind up doing is investing so much time in a project that it uses up all your profit.

G.: Byron, after three years of publishing my own material, I'm beginning to think that you have a point! ■

Jerry Ballis
21101 E. 11 Mile Rd.
St. Clair Shores, MI. 48081



INDEX TO GOLDEN AGE COMIC BOOKS

By Howard Keltner. A comprehensive index to the hero comics of the 1940's and 1950's. A labor of love.

WHO'S WHO OF AMERICAN COMIC BOOKS

In FOUR VOLUMES; Vol. 1 $5.75, Vol. 2 $7.75, Vols. 3, 4 $6.75 each, all postpaid. An immense and virtually complete listing of all the work of all the artists and writers in American comics since 1929. Unmatched as a reference work in the field.

Illustration © 1978 Jim Craig

All Things Lithe and Beautiful

by Murray Ward

IN THE MOVIE *Casino Royale*, a spoof of the James Bond spy films, the villainous Dr. Noah, played by Woody Allen, had a unique master plan up his sleeve. By unleashing a virus he had perfected, he would automatically make all women beautiful and destroy all men over the height of 4'6". "So that's your scheme," cried the hero, played by David Niven. "A world full of beautiful women and no man taller than yourself." I can't help but think that Woody had one of the various comic-book universes in mind as his model. Granted, there are men in comic books taller than 4'6". In fact, they are almost without exception at least six feet tall. But one thing you can't argue with: all the women are beautiful!

Offhand, the only unattractive women I can ever recall having seen in a comic book are old ladies. And the last time I recall seeing an old lady in a DC was in one of those stories in which Lois Lane reverted to her true age (having met Superman at approximately age 20 in 1938, she must now be nearly 60). The only lady at Marvel is, of course, resident octogenarian May Parker. And even she must have been beautiful when, if ever, she was young.

No, the plain fact is that there are no unattractive women in the world of comic books. They may be a lot slower than our real-world women at getting themselves liberated, but they are without exception good-looking in the extreme!

Why is this so? Is it merely wishful thinking on the part of the various comic artists who are, if we are to believe Gardner Fox, merely portraying adventures told to them by writers who see these events take place in their dreams? Or do the women of Earth-One, Earth-Two, and the Marvel Universe really look like applicants for a part in the Star Trek episode "Mudd's Women"?

What a wonderful place in which to be a man, if this is true! Imagine a world where all the girls look like they were drawn by Neal Adams or John Buscema or Gil Kane or Jim Starlin or Dave Cockrum or Curt Swan or Jim Aparo or Jack Kirby or...wow! And they're all highly intelligent, too. You don't become a super-heroine or even a super-hero's girlfriend just by standing around looking pretty...at least not anymore. Even the women who don't have anything to do with superheroes must be very bright and highly skilled. These stunning creatures are always milling about among the inevitable crowds of innocent bystanders at superhero battles, and they are never injured. They're either really smart and tough or incredibly lucky. And they're no consolation prizes, either; they're every bit as lovely as the heroines and heroes' girlfriends. I remember a fan writing in once to say he'd fallen in love with a girl who was looking out a window in a Silver Surfer story, and asking where he could contact her.

Of course, with the elimination of the supposedly unattractive ladies, we must realize that comic book worlds are somewhat more limited in their choice of women. There are very few soulmates available for those of us who could find happiness with only a very tall woman or a very short one. Except for the occasional Amazon and those who have not yet grown to their full height, the comic book women are invariably about 5'5", on the average. There is plenty of variety in hair color among the Caucasian ladies, even including some shades we don't have in our world, but there is a distinct limit to the number of different facial and bodily configurations you can find. (There is also less variety among the non-Caucasian girls, who all tend to look somewhat alike. The exceptions to this rule are those of skin colors not known on Earth-Real, such as blue and green. These females come in the same models as the Caucasians.) There are no fat women, no thin women, no women with any kind of physical deformity, none with any type of facial blemish or scar, and very few who wear glasses. In short, there are no women who wouldn't look terrific in a bikini.

How do these women maintain their incredible standard of pulchritude? They are not known to use inordinate amounts of any kinds of cosmetics (with the exception of lipstick), nor are they lavish in their use of perfumes and deodorants. They do, however, take a goodly number of showers and bubble-baths, which may be taken to account for their unbelievable cleanliness of skin and hair. They also exercise regularly, thus maintaining their perfect figures.

Oh yes, about their figure: there is a certain lack of variety here, too, just as there was in choice of facial features. There is the popular Jack Kirby model, coming in all types of hairdo and hair color but with essentially the same face. Jack Kirby women look like the girl next door, even if they come from outer space. The John Buscema models also tend to look alike despite an endless variety of hairdos and hair colors, but they do *not* look like the girl next door. Jack Kirby women are for holding hands; John Buscema women are for kissing; Neal Adams women are for love-making. The most lithesome of the various prototypes, the Adams woman, apparently gets more of that all-important exercise than the others. Thus she is able to attain physical positions that would break the back of a Kirby, a Swan, or even a Gil Kane woman, although the latter is also highly athletic. All comics women have general features in common: With few exceptions (usually villainesses) they have perfectly round eyes (especially when inked by Jack Abel) of either brown or blue.

©1978 Murray R. Ward

Their noses are small, almost indistinguishable, and their ears are invisible under their hair. They have small but sensuous mouths. They have long and shapely legs. And they come in only two sizes—medium (36-26-36) and large (40-26-36). Small sizes are unavailable, except in the extremely rare pre-pubescent models.

All comic book women possess these physical features whether they are practical or not. For instance, the Martian woman, who gives birth to her young by laying eggs, is nonetheless quite similar to the Earthling Amerind female. The Atlantean woman, possessing gills rather than lungs, is likewise of the same physical characteristics. A recently developed sub-type is interesting in this context: The Mike Nasser woman is obviously equipped with larger-than-normal lungs, as she seems always to be taking deep breaths and holding them for astonishing lengths of time.

Perhaps the most perplexing feature of comic book women is that despite their alluring beauty and the ready availability of attractive handsome six-foot-tall-plus males, virginity is very common. A strict moral ethic prevails regarding sex: casual liaisons are frowned upon and permanent unions are held sacred among comics females. Despite this, the occasion of such unions is statistically low. This may be due in part to the continual state of conflagration in comic book universes. We know that on our own world, there was a "boom" in marriage and child-births following each major war. However, the last time there was a break of any length in the continual war waged in comics against supervillains and galactic nemeses was in the early 1950's. Thus, there has been no period of peace which the male and female of the comic book human species might settle down with any degree of permanence to begin raising the next generation of super-humanity.

Due, I believe, to the frustration that must result from such a prolonged period of sexual inactivity, the comic book

females are much given to exhibitionism in the doomed hope of distracting their males from the more serious business at hand. Even when such attire would seem seriously to impede their locomotion, they drape themselves in the most outlandish costumes designed solely to highlight their sexual attractiveness. To this end they have also developed a high degree of immunity to extremes of temperature, enabling them to inhabit desert and arctic regions alike protected by no more material than would constitute the aforementioned bikini or a small assortment of pocket handkerchiefs.

Speaking of the next generation, the reaction of the comic book woman to pregnancy is an almost totally unexplored phenomenon. Finding herself to be with child, the comic book female presumably removes herself entirely from the company of other humans for an indefinite period ranging from one day to one year, at the end of which time she emerges again into society with her child, exhibiting no outward signs of having given birth whatsoever.

I have already mentioned in a previous column the most amazing ability of comics females. That is their ability to appear to grow younger rather than older as the years go by. One must imagine old age coming upon these enchanting creatures quite suddenly and traumatically at some period in their lives, perhaps at about age 65. Prior to that, their principal physical changes are to grow taller and more mature in appearance from puberty to about age 29 and thereafter to grow more youthful-looking at the rate of one year's regression to youth per 3.6 years aging. The advantages of this biological capacity to defy the passage of time are virtually incalculable.

In retrospect, the comic book woman seems to have it made in comparison with her real-world counterpart. Intelligent, competent, sensitive, and able to retain her supernormally high standard of physical appearance with a minimum of personal effort, she would appear to have everything going for her. In fact, her only real problem is the abundance of comics villains intent on disrobing her with little or no provocation. The latent sexual energies of the villains are apparently greater than those of the heroes. Whatever the reason, the dedicated researcher may find examples of heroines unwillingly divested of their clothing in *Incredible Hulk* #168, *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu* #32-33, and *Avengers* #162, to name but a few, while subtler examples (wherein villains do not merely undress heroines, but also provide them with a change of clothing) are to be found in *World's Finest* #245, *Ms. Marvel* #7, *Fantastic Four* #117, *Atom/Hawkman* #39, and *Marvel Feature/Red Sonja* #1. Fortunately for the mental stability the comic book heroines, these instances are still few and far between.

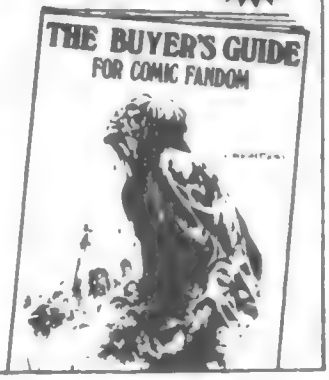
The comic book female, then is a most curious, though comely, variant of the human species, only dimly related to her sisters on Earth-Real. When the time comes that we are able to traverse the dimensional barrier separating our world from those universes depicted in comics, our scientists should at once begin a full-scale probe into the secret of these strange, exotic creatures, with special emphasis on measure to preserve the race. Since the original male-female ratio in comic universes is in excess of 10-to-1 to begin with, and since greater numbers of females are dying off under violent circumstances in recent years (e.g. *Spider-Man* #121, *Sub-Mariner* #37, *Hulk* #205, *Kamandi* #50), they are definitely to be considered an endangered species. ■

A WEEKLY NEWSPAPER FOR COMIC BOOK FANS!

Recommended by all the major comic book companies! Each issue is about 100 big newspaper-sized pages big...mostly ads to buy, sell and trade comics! Also news about comics, contests, comic convention information and reports, posters, interviews and much more! Over 10,000 comic collectors read each issue now...won't you join them? *SAMPLE COPY ONLY 50¢.* SUBSCRIBE! - 26 BIG ISSUES ONLY $5.00!

THE BUYER'S GUIDE

15800 Rt. 84 North — East Moline, Illinois 61244



THE CRAZE'S THE THING

by Murray Ward

In the last few years we comic fans have seen more new titles come and go than at any other time in the history of the medium. In their attempts to create new characters and new formats that will sell more of their product, the various comic companies, especially the two major competitors, have created countless new series and new titles, almost all of which run just long enough for the publishers to gather sales data. When this data tells them the title is failing to sell enough copies, which it almost invariably does, they cancel the series. Their ultimate goal, of course, is to create a series that is so immediately popular that it can run interminably, to create another *Superman* or *Batman*, another *Spider-Man* or *Fantastic Four*. Lately, both DC and Marvel have been batting zero in this regard. Why so? Part of the reason lies in what I call the Craze Syndrome.

The Craze Syndrome is the attempt to create a comic that will have a "built-in" audience to begin with because of its association with a current trend in other media, such as movies or television. Rather than attempting the often-costly venture of obtaining the rights to do a movie of TV show in comics form, as Gold Key has done with *Star Trek* and as Charlton did with *Space: 1999*, *Emergency*, and *The Six Million Dollar Man*, Marvel and DC have devoted most of their efforts to creating brand-new series that have some kind of tie-in with the craze of the day. (Granted, Marvel has tried various movie adaptations, but none of them has gone too far. At this writing, only *Star Wars* survives, and how long it will continue after the adaptation of the movie itself is a moot point.) Comics that imitate crazes have a history of surviving the craze that spawned them, but ultimately failing some time after the craze dies out. *Nick Fury, Agent of Shield* and *Thunder Agents* survived the TV series *Man From UNCLE* and the initial James Bond mania, but didn't outlast the secret agent craze by too many years. *Son of Satan* lasted longer than the initial enthusiasm over the film *The Exorcist*, but has since been cancelled, and its sister-mag *Ghost Rider* survives only by switching to a more super-hero type format. The Kung Fu craze spawned by the TV show of the same name and the films of Bruce Lee is dying a slow death, and on its heels came the cancellation of the various martial arts comics: *Deadly Hands of Kung Fu*, *Kung Fu Fighter*, and *Iron Fist*. *Master of Kung Fu* will probably be the last of this type of comic to go, with *Karate Kid* hanging on solely because of his connection with the Legion of Super-Heroes. A few years from now when *Six Million Dollar Man* and *Bionic Woman* eventually go off the air, I expect the various comic cyborgs in comics will follow suit. In short, comics based on TV and movie crazes may enjoy a brief moment of glory, but they don't last in the long run. So what's the answer?

Marvel was first to try an alternate method which amounted to creating their own craze. Not because of any connection with current films or television series, but simply because of a sudden revision in the standards of the Comics Code, Marvel decided to create the Monster Craze in the early 70's. They bombarded the stands with monster titles until their monster output almost equalled in number their super-hero comics. They even used the monster theme as a basis for launching their fledgling black-and-white magazine line. There was only one thing wrong with this idea: there was no monster craze in progress at the time. You can't force a craze down people's throats, at least not in comics. Movies and TV are big, influential media to which almost everybody pays attention from grandpa to baby brother. They are so all-pervasive in influencing people's thinking that they are almost impossible to ignore. Even people who wouldn't touch science fiction with a ten-foot pole have heard of the film *2001: A Space Odyssey* simply because it's a film. Even people who profess never to watch television (like the editor of this magazine) must know who Fonzie is by now simply because *Happy Days* is the number-one TV show in the ratings. Comics, however, don't have the power to pull off this kind of coup in the minds of the public, because they don't have the audience. So I'm surprised that Marvel's artificially manufactured monster craze lasted as long as it did. The only title to survive the craze was *Tomb of Dracula*, and it is hardly a major selling title at this writing. So again, what's the answer?

The currently accepted answer as far as the people producing comics are concerned seems to be that while it's better to manufacture your own craze than depend on TV and movie tie-ins, you should be careful what kind of craze you manufacture. The Marvel monster craze (DC's only attempt at a continuing monster-hero was *Swamp Thing*) had no basis in sales data. Stan Lee and Roy Thomas had no reason to assume that the comic readers of the world were breathlessly awaiting a bunch of new titles about vampires and werewolves and things that-go-bump-in-the-night. Well then, what are they looking for?

In all modesty, I could have told them the answer myself. So could almost any comics fan. The largest proportion of comics published by DC and Marvel were about super-heroes. Only a small fraction of these, however, were about TEAMS of super-heroes. Thus, about two years or so ago, the latest trend in comics made itself evident: The Super-Team Craze. And it didn't call for the creation of a lot of new characters and titles, either. Both major companies had enough super-heroes to sink a ship. Marvel, who had only the Fantastic Four and the Avengers and the hesitantly-launched Defenders as teams with their own books, suddenly inaugurated Invaders, Champions, X-Men, Inhumans, and Guardians of the Galaxy in new titles. DC, whose only teams were the Justice League and the only-recently-resuscitated Legion of Super-Heroes, came up with All Star/Justice Society, Blackhawk, Challengers of the Unknown, Freedom Fighters, Metal Men, Teen Titans, and Secret Society of Super-villains. Even the re-revival of *New Gods* is a kind of super-team book. Perhaps it's too soon to tell, but I'd say the super-teams are holding their own. Of the almost-twenty team titles created (and almost every title ever created made a comeback in 76-77), only three have been cancelled as of this writing. That's a much better sales record than the monsters, or the martial artists, or even the solo super-heroes. And the comics companies are well aware of it! More super-teams are in the offing, with Liberty Legion getting a second tryout in *Marvel Premiere* and the Doom Patrol returning in *Showcase*.

Having created one winning formula, the comics companies are already trying for two. The super-female or super-heroine is apparently the focus of the next manufactured craze. Going back to taking their cue from TV, where females currently hold title roles in such series as *Wonder Woman*, *Bionic Woman*, *Laverne and Shirley* and *Charlie's Angels*, Marvel and DC have decided to push super-hero titles featuring the fair sex the way they pushed super-teams. With the publicity given the character through her TV series as impetus, DC has upped *Wonder Woman* to monthly status and

©1978 Murray R. Ward

changed the format of the book to match the show. Marvel counters with their own new women's-lib heroine, *Ms. Marvel*, and introduces *Red Sonja* as a companion to Conan. DC then creates its own sword-swinging female, Starfire. Marvel makes sure every super-team has at least one female member, even the previously all-male Invaders and Guardians. DC has Supergirl popping up as a guest-star in the most unlikely places (although for some reason they can't make a go of her in her own title) and is giving her Earth-Two counterpart Power Girl a tryout in *Showcase*. The obvious next step is the creation, by one company or the other, of an all-female super-team. (And why not? The Legion alone has enough girls in it to form two such teams.)

If the heroines make as big splash as the teams, we can expect the comics companies to come to believe that they can successfully create a craze and thus sell comics. I hope they have more sense than that. Both of these so-called "crazes" are merely outgrowths of the types of comics that have kept the industry afloat since the beginning, except for a brief period in the early 50's: the super-heroes. More super-teams is something DC and Marvel should have thought of long time ago, and so is more females. In short, while TV and movie crazes usually last an average of three years, super-heroes have been selling consistently for longer than most of us have been reading comics. What sells comics best is a strong super-hero comic.

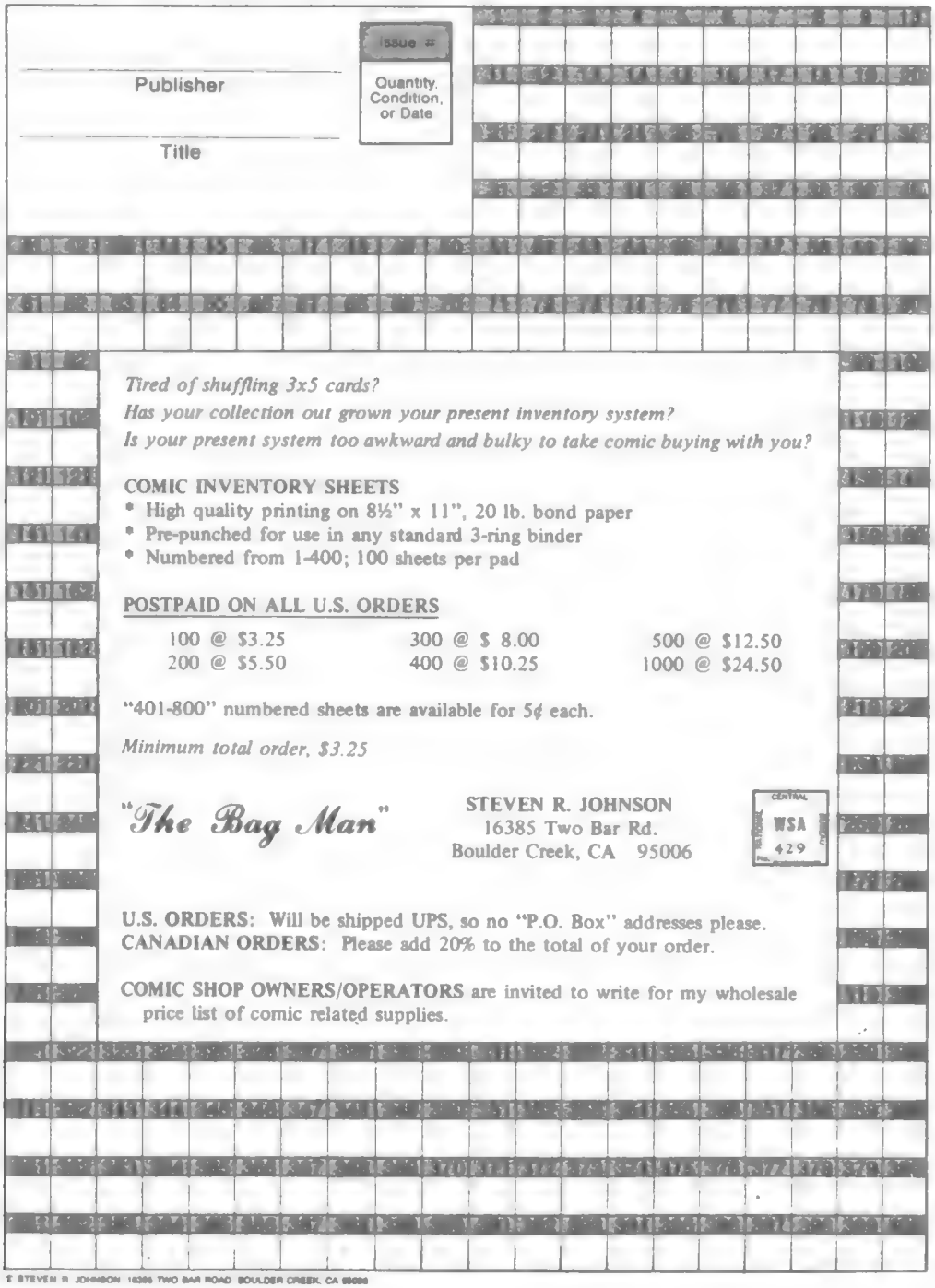
And as for the super-teams? Jim Steranko said it best in Vol. 1 of his *History of Comics:*

"None of them (the other super-heroes) could equal the popularity of DC headliners Superman and Batman (and today we can add Marvel's Spider-Man to that elite group). Singly they simply didn't stack up to the Man of Steel or his cowled associate. Of course, together they...TOGETHER! OF COURSE!...It was an epic concept, one that grouped the most popular heroes under a single title." Steranko was recalling the creation of the very first super-team comic, *All Star Comics*, featuring the Justice Society of America. Until someone creates another character with Spidey's special magic, the super-teams books are probably the only ones that can hope to match the sales of the big-name solo heroes.

And the super-heroines? Well, if anyone thinks they'll be big sellers because they'll attract the female audience, they'd better think again. The sexual equality revolution hasn't quite reached comic fandom yet. While the female fans are as outspoken as any, they are still a tiny minority. I'm afraid if super-heroines are going to be successful as a "craze," it's going to have to be because male comic fans like them. And since non-male-chauvinist-pig comic fans are also still a minority, their way to get male fans to support super-heroines is with skimpy costumes. If you don't believe me, note the success of Wonder Woman, Red Sonja, and Vampirella in their own titles, while Supergirl, whose costume covers considerably more of her anatomy, is unable to support a book of her own... and if Superman's cousin can't do it, who can?

So neither of the two successful crazes in comics (assuming it's not too soon to tell about the super-females) is really a craze at all, just a natural out-growth of things that have sold comics for years. And if and when another big-name super-hero is created to match the likes of Superman, Batman, and Spider-Man in popularity, you can be sure that it won't be because of a so-called "craze" either. ■

COMIC INVENTORY SHEETS™


Publisher
Title
Issue #
Quantity, Condition, or Date
Tired of shuffling 3x5 cards?
Has your collection out grown your present inventory system?
Is your present system too awkward and bulky to take comic buying with you?
COMIC INVENTORY SHEETS
• High quality printing on 8½" x 11", 20 lb. bond paper
• Pre-punched for use in any standard 3-ring binder
• Numbered from 1-400; 100 sheets per pad
POSTPAID ON ALL U.S. ORDERS
100 @ $3.25
200 @ $5.50
300 @ $ 8.00
400 @ $10.25
500 @ $12.50
1000 @ $24.50
"401-800" numbered sheets are available for 5¢ each.
Minimum total order, $3.25
"The Bag Man"
STEVEN R. JOHNSON
16385 Two Bar Rd.
Boulder Creek, CA 95006
CENTRAL
WSA
429
U.S. ORDERS: Will be shipped UPS, so no "P.O. Box" addresses please.
CANADIAN ORDERS: Please add 20% to the total of your order.
COMIC SHOP OWNERS/OPERATORS are invited to write for my wholesale price list of comic related supplies.
© STEVEN R. JOHNSON 16385 TWO BAR ROAD BOULDER CREEK, CA 95006

Those Marvel-ous DCs

by Murray Ward

You may remember a time not too long ago when there was a rumor circulating in fandom that Marvel Comics was going bankrupt, that Cadence Industries (the parent company) was looking for an opportunity to sell Marvel, and that DC was a possible buyer. At that time those of us who have learned the hard way that no rumor in comics is too wild to ignore began to envision a line of Marvel comics as they would be if published by DC. The rumor happily proved false, but the strange vision of a line of DC-produced Marvels remained with me for some time. What could such comics possibly look like? Strangely enough, I found I could conjure up a pretty good idea. Whence came these strange visions? Where had I ever seen anything that looked like DC-Marvels before?

DC-Marvels! The phrase rang a bell! I remember the mid-60's, when it seemed like every time I went hunting for back issues I ran into some comic reader or collector I'd never met before. Naturally one of the first things I'd ask on meeting someone like this was, "What titles do you collect?" One guy, whose name I can't recall at the moment, told me he collected *Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Daredevil, Avengers*...I stopped him before he rhymed off the whole Marvel line. "You collect all the Marvels, then," I said. "Yeah," he answered, a bit disappointed at not being able to show off his ability to remember all the Marvel titles. "And what about the DCs?" I asked. "Do you collect any of them?" "Naw, they're too dull," he replied, shaking his head. From experience with fanatic Marvelites (I was one myself when I first discovered Marvel), I knew he had just consigned all the familiar titles edited by Mort Weisinger and Julius Schwartz to the junk-heap.

Par for the course, I thought to myself. Once a fan gets hooked on Stan Lee "realism," it's hard for him to recapture the sense of wonder he used to find in the pseudo-science fiction scripts of Gardner Fox and John Broome, and harder still to remain appreciative of the various authors of the Superman Family titles. Myself, I knew the DCs hadn't really changed for the worse (this was before the Batman "camp" craze), but once you got Marvels in your blood, something in those Stan Lee-Jack Kirby-Steve Ditko collaborations got in your system for good. There was a PR aspect to the early Marvels that convinced you that by reading them you had taken the next step towards maturity. First you had graduated from "funny-books" to DCs; now you had made the jump from DCs to Marvels, the more "adult" comics. (Of course no one ever mentioned what the next step beyond Marvels was going to be. Presumably this was a variety of comics so "adult" they had yet to be invented.)

To my surprise, however, the Marvel fan continued to speak. He paused a moment after having relegated DC comics to the ashbin and added, "*Except the Marvel sort of DCs.* They're okay." "Marvel DCs?" I asked, taken aback. "The DC-Marvels, I call 'em," he explained. "You know, the ones that are like Marvels the way they're written." And he began to name off titles, counting them on his fingers. Then I knew what he meant.

The DC-Marvels or, as he defined them, the DCs that read like Marvels instead of being dull like the usual DCs, were few in number compared to the DC main line. The names of the heroes they featured are easily forgotten compared to the immortal Superman and Batman and the various reincarnated All-American characters like Flash, Green Lantern, Atom and Hawkman. But for a large number of those Marvel fans in the 1960's who still had some of their allowance left after buying all the Marvels, these were the only DC comics they read.

Speaking for myself, the DC "big-name" titles still had a certain attraction even after I got into that ol' Marvel magic. Marvels were an exclusive club; every one of their then-small group of a dozen or so titles had an evolving storyline and changing cast of characters, and more often than not featured continued stories. You had to keep up with the Marvels every month or you might miss something. Then you'd have to scrabble around for back issues to catch up on what you'd missed. Furthermore, all the titles were interconnected just as they are today, and missing an issue of one was as likely to leave you in the dark as to developments in a sister-title as it was to confuse you about the title you were reading. For example, when the Fantastic Four's arch-nemeses the Frightful Four formed their evil team for the first time in *Fantastic Four #36,* a lot of readers who had been reading *Fantastic Four* faithfully must have wondered where all these villains had come from. The Wizard and Paste-Pot Pete (now the Trapster) were old Human Torch baddies from the pages of *Strange Tales,* and the Sandman was a Spider-Man foe. Madame Medusa was a truly new, never-before-seen character, but the others were just as new to the readers who followed no other Marvels than *Fantastic Four.*

The DCs of the period were a welcome respite from the Marvel Universe and its fast-paced continuity. Where all the Marvel heroes stumbled about New York City bumping into each other, the DC heroes each had separate fictional cities to protect from the bad guys. Superman might occasionally save the universe, but he always returned to Metropolis. Batman patrolled Gotham City, the Flash sped across the streets of Central City, and Green Lantern was out in California somewhere in a place called Coast City. And while you couldn't afford to miss an issue of a Marvel title, you could come back to DC any old time and find your old favorite heroes fighting your old favorite villains in new-plot-every-issue non-continued stories at the same old stand. Where the Marvels changed, the DCs remained the same, and though many fans disliked the unchanging nature of the DC titles, I found them a pleasant haven to relax in after a hard month's work saving the Marvel Universe from chaos and destruction.

For most die-hard Marvelites, though, these DC titles were a big nothing. But the DC-Marvels, as my acquaintance had dubbed them, were quite another thing altogether. They had heroes with strange and weird powers and abilities, nothing so tame as simple strength or speed or athletic ability. They had heroes who took on menaces so unearthly Superman wouldn't have known what to make of them. They had heroes who like the Marvel heroes, knew how to laugh at themselves. They had heroes with oddball names like Metal Men, the Doom Patrol, Eclipso, Prince Ra-Man—Mind-Master, Metamorpho the Element Man, and Robby Reed the Boy who can change into 1,000 Super-Heroes.

The Metal Men are one of several DC

© 1978 Murray R. Ward

super-teams that have returned from oblivion in the current super-team craze. Robot heroes fashioned by the genius inventor Doc Magnus, they have the powers of the metallic elements from which they take their names: Gold, Tin, Lead, Iron, Mercury, and Platinum. That sounds normal enough, but the early Metal Men created by Bob Kanigher and drawn by Ross Andru and Mike Esposito, were anything but normal. First off, each robot hero had a single dominant personality trait (robots with personalities?) which matched his metallic power. Gold was gallant and noble—a born ruler of men...er, robots; Tin was humble and insecure and stammered when he spoke (a stammering robot?); Lead was a bit slow on the uptake, as befitting a character whose head was made of lead; Iron was the strong silent type; Mercury was hot-tempered and irascible; and Platinum Tina, the female of the group, had a crush on her inventor. Not only that, but the Metal Men were *destroyed*—not once, but again and again, as they battled menaces to mankind. Of course, being robots, they could be rebuilt by Doc Magnus whenever they were "killed." Somehow, though, Metal Men readers worried more about something happening to their heroes than did Superman's readers. Robots who could be destroyed created more suspense than a Kryptonian who couldn't be hurt. And besides, the Metal Men were specialists. Where Superman took on menaces from space and Batman battled earthly criminals, the Metal Men fought evil robots. Who but they could have defeated an army of talking "missile men," an interplanetary amusement park bent on destroying its users, a giant humanoid resembling nothing more that a walking test-tube of chemicals, animated robot bell-buoys from beneath the sea, or an enormous amoeba that threatened to engulf the Earth like a runaway omelet?

Another recently revived DC team is the Doom Patrol. The original team, brought to life by Arnold Drake and Bruno Premiani, were also specialists like the Metal Men. The Metal Men fought robots; the DP fought the weird and the strange. The Doom Patrol were freaks—humans who had survived accidents that should have been fatal but has instead endowed them with fantastic powers. Where other super-heroes were hailed for their mighty deeds, however, the Doom Patrol members were shunned because of their inhuman appearances. There was Robotman, whose human brain was preserved in a metal body following a car crash; Negative Man, whose bandaged body was radioactive and who could emit an uncanny radio-energy being from his human form—a being who traveled at the speed of light; Elasti-Girl, who could shrink, stretch, or enlarge her body at will; and The Chief, leader and founder of the team, a brilliant scientist confined to a wheelchair. Many readers compared the DP to Marvel's Fantastic Four and X-Men. One way in which they were similar was in the type of readers they attracted. The Doom Patrol villains were so weird that they made the heroes, known as the "Fabulous Freaks," look normal by comparison. These included the Brain; a mass of grey matter in a bottle of preserving liquid; Mallah, a gorilla with the mind of a genius; Madame Rouge, whose rubbery skin gave her the power of disguising herself as anybody; Garguax, the green-skinned alien who commanded an army of plastic androids; and General Immortus, an evil schemer who had lived for hundreds of years thanks to a secret serum. Confronted with foes like these, the more "normal" DC super-heroes might have panicked, and with good reason. Confronted with the same foes, the Doom Patrol laughed and sallied forth to fight the good fight.

Metamorpho the Element Man has been given several tryouts in an attempt to bring him back—first as a back-up in *Action Comics,* and then on his own in *First Issue Special.* Taking a breather from his usual grind of team-up stories

3 MIL COMIC BAGS

HIGH CLARITY POLYETHYLENE PLASTIC — SIDESEAMED — NO PRINTING

POSTPAID ON ALL U.S. ORDERS

	WEST OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER	EAST OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER
CURRENT - 6 7/8" x 10 1/4" with 2" flap *Fits all Marvel, DC, Atlas, Gold Key comics, etc., published since Jan. 1975*	100 @ $ 2.70 300 @ $ 6.75 500 @ $10.75 1000 @ $20.75 2000 @ $38.50	100 @ $ 2.80 300 @ $ 7.25 500 @ $11.50 1000 @ $21.75 2000 @ $40.50
REGULAR - 7 1/8" x 10 1/4" with 2" flap *Fits all Marvel, DC (since 1965), Charlton, Gold Key comics, etc.*	100 @ $ 2.70 300 @ $ 7.00 500 @ $11.00 1000 @ $21.25 2000 @ $39.50	100 @ $ 2.80 300 @ $ 7.50 500 @ $11.75 1000 @ $22.25 2000 @ $41.50
SILVER AGE - 7 5/16" x 10 1/4" with 2" flap *Fits all DC's from 1951 - 1965, 80 Page Giants, Marvel 25¢ annuals, some Golden Age*	100 @ $ 2.80 300 @ $ 7.25 500 @ $11.25 1000 @ $22.00 2000 @ $40.75	100 @ $ 2.90 300 @ $ 7.75 500 @ $12.00 1000 @ $23.00 2000 @ $43.75
GOLDEN AGE - 7 5/8" x 10 1/4" with 2" flap *Fits most Golden Age (DC's from 1944 - 1950), and all Dell comics*	100 @ $ 3.00 300 @ $ 7.25 500 @ $11.50 1000 @ $22.25 2000 @ $41.00	100 @ $ 3.25 300 @ $ 7.75 500 @ $12.25 1000 @ $23.25 2000 @ $44.00
MAGAZINE - 8 1/2" x 11" with 2" flap *Fits all Marvel, DC, Charlton, and most Warren black & white magazines*	100 @ $ 3.60 300 @ $ 9.25 500 @ $15.00 1000 @ $27.25	100 @ $ 3.80 300 @ $ 9.75 500 @ $15.75 1000 @ $28.50
FANZINE - 8 3/4" x 11" with 2" flap *Fits all 8½" x 11" publications, Playboy, etc.; early Warren black & white magazines*	100 @ $ 3.80 300 @ $10.00 1000 @ $29.25	100 @ $ 4.00 300 @ $10.50 1000 @ $30.50
TREASURY - 10 1/2" x 13 1/2" with 2" flap *Fits all Marvel and DC oversize comics ($1.00, $1.50, & $2.00 comics)*	100 @ $ 5.25 300 @ $14.25 1000 @ $43.00	100 @ $ 5.50 300 @ $15.00 1000 @ $45.00
COMIC ART - 16 3/8" x 11 3/4" with 2" flap *Fits most pages of modern comic book art; and many Sunday newspaper strips*	100 @ $ 7.00 300 @ $20.00 500 @ $32.50	100 @ $ 7.25 300 @ $20.75 500 @ $33.50
MAGAZINE ART - 18" x 11 3/4" with 2" lip *Fits most pages of original art to black & white magazines, and covers of modern comics*	100 @ $ 8.00 300 @ $22.25 500 @ $36.50	100 @ $ 8.25 300 @ $23.00 500 @ $37.50
ALBUM JACKET COVER - 12 3/4" x 13" 4 mil polyethylene; no flap *Fits the outside jacket of most record albums*	100 @ $ 6.25 300 @ $16.75 500 @ $26.00	100 @ $ 6.50 300 @ $17.75 500 @ $27.50

"The Bag Man"

STEVEN R. JOHNSON
16385 Two Bar Rd.
Boulder Creek, CA 95006

A sample bag will be mailed upon any request which is accompanied by a large SASE

U.S. ORDERS: Will be shipped UPS, so no "P.O. Box" addresses please.

CANADIAN ORDERS: Please use the "East of the Mississippi River" rates and add 20%.

HAWAII & ALASKA ORDERS: Please use the "East of the Mississippi River" rates.

COMIC SHOP OWNERS/OPERATORS in the Western U.S. area are invited to write for my wholesale price list.

NOW SERVING OVER 60 WESTERN U.S. COMIC SHOPS

CENTRAL NATIONAL WSA BUREAU No. 429

In *The Brave and the Bold,* Bob Haney created the Element Man, dubbed "the World's Most Fantastic New Hero." And he sure was. Like the Metal Men, he had the powers of the various chemical elements. (I learned a lot of chemistry from Metamorpho and the Metal Men long before I ever took the subject in school.) And like the Doom Patrol, he was a freak, doomed to live in an inhuman-looking body, while battling villains even odder looking than himself. Originally Rex Mason, adventurer/soldier of fortune, he was double-crossed by his employer, millionaire Simon Stagg, and left to die in an Egyptian pyramid. Instead he returned to America mutated into a unique being who could change his form into any of the elements found in the human body. If his metallic fists couldn't stop the villain, Metamorpho could escape in the form of a jet of gas, then return to destroy his enemy's hideout as a living chemical bomb. What I liked the best about Metamorpho was his tough-guy dialogue. He sounded much like Marvel's Ben Grimm, a.k.a. the Thing, than like the straight-laced Flash or Batman. Awakening from unconsciousness to confront the murderous Maxwell Tremaine, for instance, Metamorpho's first words were: "Where in the blazes am I? And who are you, buster—a refugee from a shirt ad?"

Today's readers know *House of Secrets* as one of the DC mystery mags, filled with tales of ghosts and the supernatural. But in the mid-60's, it was home to two super-characters, in the style of such Marvel two-in-one titles as *Strange Tales, Tales to Astonish,* and *Tales of Suspense.* The original continuing feature in HOS was a chap called Mark Merlin, an adventurer who traveled the globe investigating occult happenings. When super-heroes enjoyed their greatest rise in popularity in the early mid-60's, Mark Merlin was transformed into Prince Ra-Man, a magician from another dimension. Not only was Ra-Man different from the main crew of DC stars, he had a double attraction to Marvel readers. First, his name was similar to that of Marvel's sub-sea monarch, Prince Namor the Sub-mariner, who also shared a magazine with another character. Second, Ra-Man bore a startling resemblance to his mystic counterpart at Marvel, Dr. Strange.

The Prince's co-star in HOS was very much like Sub-mariner's back-up in *Astonish,* as well. Like the Hulk, Eclipso was a brilliant scientist (Dr. Bruce Gordon, rather than Dr. Bruce Banner) who changed into the unpredictable Eclipso whenever there was an eclipse in the heavens. Unlike the Hulk, who was never really evil but merely a misunderstood monster, Eclipso was a villain through and-through. The stories centered around the conflict between Eclipso's two identities as they fought for control. In later stories, Eclipso split off from Dr. Gordon to become an entirely separate entity, but his essence could still be imprisoned in Gordon's body. Eclipso most recently appeared as a villain in Justice League and Metal Men stories.

DC's other "House" mystery mag, *House of Mystery,* was also a super-hero title in the 60's. The Martian Manhunter, charter member of the JLA, held forth in the pages of HOM for many years, but it is not he who qualified as one of the DC-Marvels. The feature that began by sharing the title with J'Onn J'Onzz and eventually took it away from him entirely was Dial H for Hero. These were the adventures of Robby Reed, "the boy who can change into 1,000 super-heroes." The title is almost totally self-explanatory. Robby's amazing H-Dial, an alien device he found in a hidden cave, enabled him to take on the powers and identities of a different super-hero each time he twirled the dial to the letters H-E-R-O. (The dial resembled that of a telephone.) The only catch was that Robby never knew what super-hero he was going to become in advance. There may well have been 1,000 hero-forms attainable through the dial; we never got to see Bobby use even a tenth of them. All the heroes were brand-new characters, never before seen in comics (with the exception of one occasion when Robby turned into Plastic Man), and it was a real challenge to the scripter to come up with new heroes every issue.

None of these heroes was ever a part of DC's main line of titles. None of them were ever members of that august organization, the Justice League of America. Indeed, the only one of them ever to join, Metamorpho, refused the offer violently. That's about as different as a DC hero can get.

You will have noticed by now another thing the DC-Marvels have in common. They were all cancelled at some point in the later 60's, and the only ones that remain on the scene today are those undergoing a revival. What killed off these unique characters in the first place, you may ask? Well, I'm not entirely sure. It might have been humor. Yes, humor. With the exception of Ra-Man and Ecipso, all these strips were affected by the "camp" craze in that the characters would often descend to slapstick humor escapades in the midst of supposedly life-and-death situations. Then, in an attempt to save the titles from cancellation, the writers and editors dropped the humor and substituted tragedy. The Metal Men, Metamorpho, and the Doom Patrol all ran issues which cover-featured the deaths of the title characters. The Metal Men returned to life in humanoid disguises, an idea that never caught on with their fans. Metamorpho returned to life just in time to be dropped from the DC lineup. The Doom Patrol fooled everybody: they died and stayed dead!

Will the so-called DC-Marvels ever come back to stay? I hope so, as they were once among my favorite comics titles. But it won't be quite the same, somehow. The DC mainline is no longer the solid bastion of unchanging characters and non-continued storylines that once it was. In the 60's we didn't have a Batman who had regained his creature-of-the-night image under the pencil of Neal Adams; we didn't have two-part stories in the Flash; we didn't have a Green Lantern who had learned "relevancy" from his travels with Green Arrow; we didn't have Steve Englehart-written Justice League stories, or even Denny O'Neil ones; and we didn't have a Superman who occasionally talks and acts like a human being. It would be nice to have Metal Men and Doom Patrol stick around, and to have Metamorpho, Prince Ra-Man, Eclipso, and Robby Reed come back to join them. But they can never be the bridge between DC and Marvel that they used to be.

The need for such a bridge is fast disappearing. ■

Please send any and all correspondence to Murray Ward at the following address:

P. O. Box 3693
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

ZINES

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

THE FIRST KINGDOM
#1-7 @ 90¢ ea.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

THE FIRST KINGDOM
COLLECTED @ $5.50

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

QUACK!
#2-6 @ $1.10 ea.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

STAR*REACH
#1-11 @ $1.10 ea.
#12 @ $1.35 ea.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

SOJOURN
#1,2 @ $1.35 ea.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

POWER COMICS
#1 @ 65¢ ea.
#2-5 @ 45¢ ea.

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

WSA U.S. ORDERS ONLY WSA
1197 ADD 50¢ P & H 1197

Richard M. Noland
4202 Ann Fitz Hugh Drive
Annandale, Virginia 22003

by Dick O'Malley

In The Beginning

***A CHRONOLOGY OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR** from their origins through the wedding of Sue and Reed, in three parts: A narrative of the early years, a set of plot synopses of the comic stories in chronological order, and an interview with the Human Torch.*

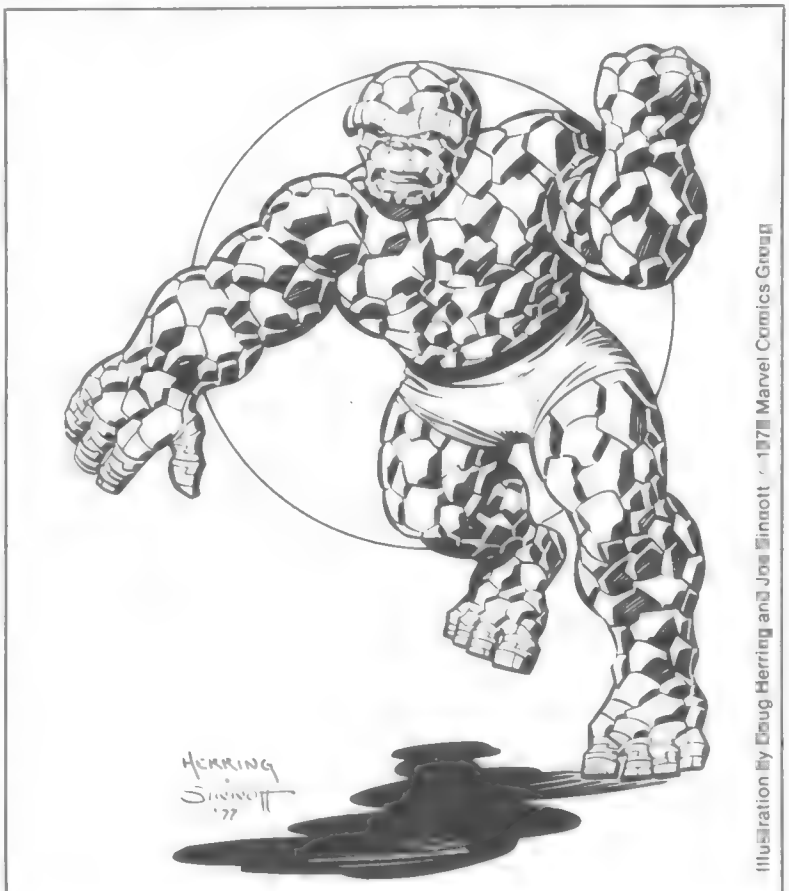


Illustration by Doug Herring and Joe Sinnott © 1978 Marvel Comics Group

The ROOTS OF THE ORIGIN OF THE Fantastic Four can be traced all the way back to 1938. In the autumn of that year, Reed Richards, Ben Grimm, and Victor Von Doom entered the Empire State University as freshmen together. All three of them were attending on full scholarship. It was all they had in common.

Von Doom was a European. His father Werner Von Doom was a gypsy; his mother Cynthia Von Doom is rumored to have been a witch. Little more is known. Von Doom was humorless, proud, and aggressive. He was driven by an uncompromising fire to master his environment, to bend it to his will—to make it serve him. To Von Doom, life was an enemy to be conquered.

Richards was a tall, lanky youth, easy-going, with a smile always ready to spring to his lips. Richards was a millionaire's son, living in the lap of luxury. To him, life was a game to be played and understood.

Grimm was massive and strong. Though he played at living up to his name, his eyes betrayed him. In Ben Grimm's eyes there was a sparkle beneath the blue, a sheer joy in being alive. Grimm was a city boy. He'd grown up on Yancy Street in New York, the son of two working parents. Where Von Doom and Richards had come to ESU on science scholarships, Grimm had come to play football.

Richards and Von Doom encountered each other first. Reed, supposing that two science students might have something in common, sounded out the possibility of rooming with the European. Victor VD (as he would come to be known in a short time) was instantly repelled by the thought. Von Doom desired privacy, not the company of fools! Victor stalked out in a mild rage, bumping into Ben Grimm, leaving Richards to scratch his head in mild bemusement.

Grimm was not favorably impressed with Von Doom. He exchanged only as many words as sufficed to ascertain that Reed Richards was nearby, for Grimm had been seeking out the "big brain" who was reputed to be smarter than the faculty. He thought it might be interesting for the "Touchdown King" to room with the guy. After Von Doom, Richards was all too glad to accept the offer.

On the surface, Grimm and Richards apparently had nothing in common. They were poor boy and rich boy, athlete and genius, scowler and laugher; but they shared a common perception beneath it all, and became as close as friends can be. No one cheered more loudly than Reed Richards at Ben Grimm's exploits on the gridiron, and no one was prouder than Ben Grimm as Reed Richards won honor after academic honor. Never has it been truer that opposites tend to attract, and never has the word "friend" meant more than it did here.

But where Grimm and Richards prospered and went on to fame and fortune, Von Doom's life was literally scarred with tragedy. During that first year, an unauthorized experiment by Von Doom resulted in an explosion that killed at least one person and seriously injured Von Doom himself. Von Doom recovered, but his face, previously very handsome, had become a mass of scar tissue. (It is said that the mere sight of it unhinged Von Doom's mind, but there's no real way to substantiate *that* story.)

In any case, Von Doom's attitudes had won him few friends among the faculty. When the nature of his experiment was revealed it was decided that Von Doom was dangerously erratic and he was summarily expelled.

Von Doom returned to Europe. A few years later, his wanderings took him into the Himalayas. It would be twenty years before the world heard from him again.

Von Doom's fate may have seemed star-crossed. If so, then perhaps Richards and Grimm were the stars. After successful collegiate careers, the two friends both went into the armed services—Reed into the OSS to serve with the underground in occupied France, Ben into the Pacific theatre as a fighter pilot. Grimm became not only a hero on the football field, but also thanks to an active publicity department, a hero to every American who could read the morning paper. He served over Guadalcanal and Okinawa. He was an ace. He was a living symbol of his country's fighting forces. Reed, on the other hand, was no less a hero, even though the very nature of his job precluded any publicity. Nevertheless, Reed came out of the war only a few medals shy of Audie Murphy—and with his hair turned prematurely grey at the temples. It has been said that Reed did more to disrupt Nazi activities than any other single man.

The exploits of Ben Grimm and Reed Richards are legend, yet only twice have we seen them in action during the Great Conflict. Reed appeared once, in *Sgt. Fury* #3; Ben appeared once, in *Captain Savage* #7. These stories hap-

© 1978 Dick O'Malley

Illustration by Larry Houston and Doug Herring • ©1978 Marvel Comics Group

pened late in 1942, and in 1944, respectively.

Eventually the War ended and life resumed. Richards meticulously cultivated his growing reputation as the keenest scientific mind the world had ever produced. It was the most sought-after mind in the country, for often Richards could take one glance at a problem and immediately figure out the best way to proceed—if a way could be found. And so, the Richards name came to be involved in projects cutting across a broad spectrum of sciences. Grimm, too, held down a public career—*two* of them in fact. His reputation as an incredible flyer made him the most sought-after test pilot in an age of aerodynamic progress; he commanded enormous fees. And in the autumn he played professional football, simply because he loved the game, and because he enjoyed playing the hero.

Through the rest of the 1940's and through most of the 1950's things continued in the same way for Grimm and Richards. But as the latter decade

A Chronology of The Next Few Years

The task of fitting nearly one hundred separate Fantastic Four appearances in various magazines into a space of time numbering less than fifty months is an enormous undertaking.

I have tried to follow a few basic assumptions: The adventures related in the pages of *Fantastic Four* seem to be told in chronological order. This is not strictly true of the Torch solos in *Strange Tales*, though it serves as a good first approximation. And, finally, time does not stand still.

This last assumption is the critical one. If time were to stand still in the Marvel Universe, then the Marvel Universe would be marked as an unreality, for in the real world entropy always increases.

The chronology is as complete as I can possibly make it. Still, it represents a best guess, and so should not be taken as definitive (though I like to think of it as such ...). I provide explanations why, but comments would be appreciated if someone can find something I haven't seen.

FANTASTIC FOUR #1 (11/61)

"The Fantastic Four" 13 pp.

Judging by the lack of leaves upon the trees in this story, the origin of the Fantastic Four seems to have occurred not in the summer of 1961, but in the autumn of the year, most likely sometime in September (it *may* have been early enough to fall *technically* in the summer).

"The Mole Man" 11 pp.

This adventure had to occur several weeks after the origin story, marking it no earlier than October 1961.

FANTASTIC FOUR #2 (1/62)

"The Skrulls from Outer Space" 24 pp.

Without any interior indications, it's always difficult to place a story. But if we assume that issue #2 occurs between issues #1 and #3, then the adventure with the Skrulls had to happen in November or early December 1961.

FANTASTIC FOUR #3 (3/62)

"The Menace of the Miracle Man" 23 pp.

The adventure with the Miracle Man immediately precedes *Fantastic Four* #4, marking this issue in December.

FANTASTIC FOUR #4 (5/62)

"The Coming of the Sub-Mariner" 23 pp.

Judging from the fact that several teenagers are running about, this story either occurred on a weekend, or during the Christmas-New Year vacation. I believe it is incredibly appropriate to begin the New Year with the coming of the Sub-Mariner.

FANTASTIC FOUR #5 (7/62)

"Prisoners of Doctor Doom" 23 pp.

Trees are still barren at the time of this story. If the Torch is reading a copy of the first issue of the *Incredible Hulk*, then it must be no earlier than February 1962.

FANTASTIC FOUR #6 (9/62)

"Captives of the Deadly Duo" 24 pp.

Namor has been inactive for quite some time. This marks the story as several months after issue four. It may have occurred as early as May 1962.

FANTASTIC FOUR #7 (10/72)

"Prisoners of Kurrgo, Master of Planet X" 24 pp.

This adventure probably happened in June or July 1962. There are no indications in the comic.

FANTASTIC FOUR #8 (11/62)

"Prisoners of the Puppet Master" 23 pp.

Probably late July 1962.

FANTASTIC FOUR #9 (12/62)

"The End of the Fantastic Four" 23 pp.

Since Johnny spent a good deal of time on the West Coast in this adventure, it was most likely one that happened in the summer of the year. It could have happened no later than August 1962.

STRANGE TALES #101 (10/62)

"The Human Torch" 13 pp.

Johnny is back in school when this adventure begins. It may be that the FF was not yet back in operation after going bankrupt. If so, then it would explain why the Torch began operating on his own in September 1962.

STRANGE TALES #102 (11/62)

"Prisoner of the Wizard" 13 pp.

There was sufficient time for newsreel photos of the previous issue's adventure to hit the theatres, but it had not been long enough for it to become old news. Therefore, the Torch's first encounter with the Wizard must have been in late September or early October 1962.

STRANGE TALES #103 (12/62)

"Prisoner of the 5th Dimension" 13 pp.

The FF was clearly operating by this time. I put this adventure in October 1962 for no particular reason.

FANTASTIC FOUR #10 (1/63)

"The Return of Doctor Doom" 23 pp.

Probably late October 1962. In any case, it was several months after *Fantastic Four* #6.

STRANGE TALES #104 (1/63)

"Paste-Pot Pete" 13 pp.

Probably November 1962.

STRANGE TALES #106 (3/63)

"The Threat of the Torrid Twosome" 13 pp.

No, I haven't forgotten *Strange Tales* #105. For reasons we'll see later, I believe issue #105 happened a good deal after this story, which was probably in late November 1962.

STRANGE TALES #108 (Flashback; see below)

Human Torch captures Wilhelm Van Vile the *first* time, in December 1962.

STRANGE TALES #107 (4/63)

"The Master of Flame vs. the Monarch of the Sea" 13 pp.

This was one month after *Strange Tales* #106, and so must have occurred just before Christmas vacation in 1962.

STRANGE TALES #109 (6/63)

"The Sorceror and Pandora's Box" 13 pp.

The mention of a high school basketball *tournament* (in which J. Storm scored 75 points!) means that this must have occurred over the Christmas vacation. High school tournaments (except for the championship variety) are played at no other time.

FANTASTIC FOUR #11 (2/63)

"A Visit with the Fantastic Four" 11 pp.

This was Sue Storm's birthday. Since the woman is obviously an Aquarius, it had to occur late in January or early in February 1963. It would have been Sue's 23rd birthday, I believe.

"The Impossible Man" 11 pp.

This would have happened shortly after the other story in issue #11, sometime in February 1963.

STRANGE TALES #105 (2/63)

"The Return of the Wizard" 13 pp.

In order to allow sufficient time for the Wizard to be tried, sentenced, and to become a prison trustee, this story has to be moved forward at least as far as February or March 1963. That the story follows *Strange Tales* #106 is substantiated by the fact that neither

reached its end, things began to change. Ben was beginning to grow older; for beyond the 35th year, a man's reflexes begin to dim. Both of his careers would soon end, and Ben wasn't sure he could adjust. He felt he would become a bitter man. But for Reed, the *answer* to confusion came with Sputnik in 1957. He'd been spreading himself thinly, working on the projects of *others*—not his own. To Richards, the end of the decade meant a beginning.

Reed buried himself, to the exclusion of nearly everything else, in the problem of designing a propulsion system that would be effective, efficient, and reliable. He had the answer (he thought) in a matter of months.

The government was mildly shocked—not so credulous as to abandon their fledgling space program, but nevertheless fully aware of Richards' reputation for coming up with quantum logic jumps. It was decided that the best approach would be to build a prototype of Richards' design in secret. The reasons for secrecy were twofold: 1) should the project fail, it would not affect the atmosphere of ultimate success so essential to NASA, and 2) should it succeed, well ... the propaganda effect *alone* would be enormous.

Did I say failure? There was *never* any question that Richards' rocket could *reach* the moon. The questions were: Could it come back? and Would the passengers be alive if it did? As far as President Eisenhower was concerned, these were the only important questions, and he would not authorize a launch of the "pocket rocket" until they were answered. Richards could afford to be patient, though, for Eisenhower would soon be out of office. Perhaps the new President would be less reticent.

He wasn't. Kennedy, too, felt that the risks were too great to warrant risking lives unnecessarily. What he *did* was to direct that the prototype be kept flight-ready against the possibility that the Soviets were further along than they were thought to be.

Richards was furious and frustrated. The pocket rocket was the crowning achievement of his career, fully capable of ending the space race in one fell swoop. And it was just *sitting* there! The more he thought about it, the madder he became. Finally he determined that, by God, if *they* were afraid to do it, then he'd steal it, and do it *himself*.

Unfortunately, it wasn't that simple. As has been related elsewhere, Reed was coerced (some say blackmailed) into taking along his fiancee and her brother. With two other people to worry about, Reed wanted to get the best pilot available—just in case. Who better that Ben Grimm?

The foursome of Reed Richards, Ben

Illustrations by
Tom Bilinsky
© 1978 Marvel Comics Group

---

the Torch nor the Invisible Girl showed any concern when the Wizard saw Johnny's face, indicating that Johnny's identity had become common knowledge already.

FANTASTIC FOUR #12 (3/63)

"The Incredible Hulk" 23 pp.

If the events of *What If?* #1 can serve as a rough guide, then *Fantastic Four* #12 happened just a couple of weeks before the frantic events of late March and Early April 1963. Thus, the FF's first epic encounter with the Hulk would have occurred in the first or second week of March 1963.

STRANGE TALES #108 (5/63)

"The Painter of a Thousand Perils" 13 pp.

Back in December, just before *Strange Tales* #107, the Torch captured a forger named Wilhelm van Vile. Van Vile escaped from prison shortly thereafter, turning up again late in March of 1963.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #1 (3/63)

"Spider-Man" 14 pp.

FANTASTIC FOUR (Annual) #1 (1963)

"The Fabulous Fantastic Four Meet Spider-Man" 6 pp.

The two-page sequence detailing Spider-Man's first encounter with the FF was later expanded to a six-page feature in *Fantastic Four* (Annual) #1. This incident occurred late in March.

FANTASTIC FOUR #13 (4/63)

"The Red Ghost and His Indescribable Super-Apes" 22 pp.

Again, if *What If?* #1 can be used as a guide, this adventure on the moon happened very shortly after *Spider-Man* #1, taking up the first part of April 1963.

FANTASTIC FOUR #14 (5/63)

"Sub-Mariner and the Merciless Puppet Master" 22 pp.

This adventure happened immediately upon the FF's return to Earth, in April 1963.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #3 (7/63)

"Doctor Octopus" 21 pp.

The Torch had a virus during Spider-Man's first fight with Doctor Octopus. I suggest that he caught his cold in *Fantastic Four* #14, which would put this story in early May 1963.

STRANGE TALES #110 (7/63)

"The Wizard and Paste-Pot Pete" 13 pp.

Probably occurring in May 1963.

FANTASTIC FOUR #15 (6/63)

"The Mad Thinker and His Awesome Android" 20 pp.

Again, Johnny took off for an extended period of time, indicating that school was out for the summer. The story must have happened early in June 1963.

FANTASTIC FOUR #16 (7/63)

"The Micro-World of Doctor Doom" 22 pp.

From the Ant-Man's caution in dealing with the Wasp, this adventure can be judged to have occurred soon after Janet became his partner. Saying that it occurred in June 1963 may be pushing it somewhat, but it's within the realm of possibility.

FANTASTIC FOUR #17 (8/63)

"Defeated by Doctor Doom" 22 pp.

If #16 is in June 1963, then so is #17, because it happened right away.

STRANGE TALES #111 (8/63)

"Fighting to the Death with the Asbestos Man" 13 pp.

This one probably happened in June as

Grimm, Sue Storm, and Johnny Storm drove into space and encountered a particularly intense cosmic radiation storm. As a result, in a story familiar to us all, the Fantastic Four were born, and the world would never be the same.

The Mole Man and The Skrulls

The GOVERNMENT WAS MORE than a little bit upset at having their rocket stolen—even if the thief was none other than the man who had designed it in the first place. Richards was in trouble, but he had an obvious way out. He had two bargaining chips: new information about the effects of cosmic radiation and the Fantastic Four themselves.

The FF was set up as a special, independent unit of operatives, at the call of the government but with the freedom to choose and to reject their own assignments. In theory, the FF would tackle cases too unusual or difficult for ordinary operatives to handle.

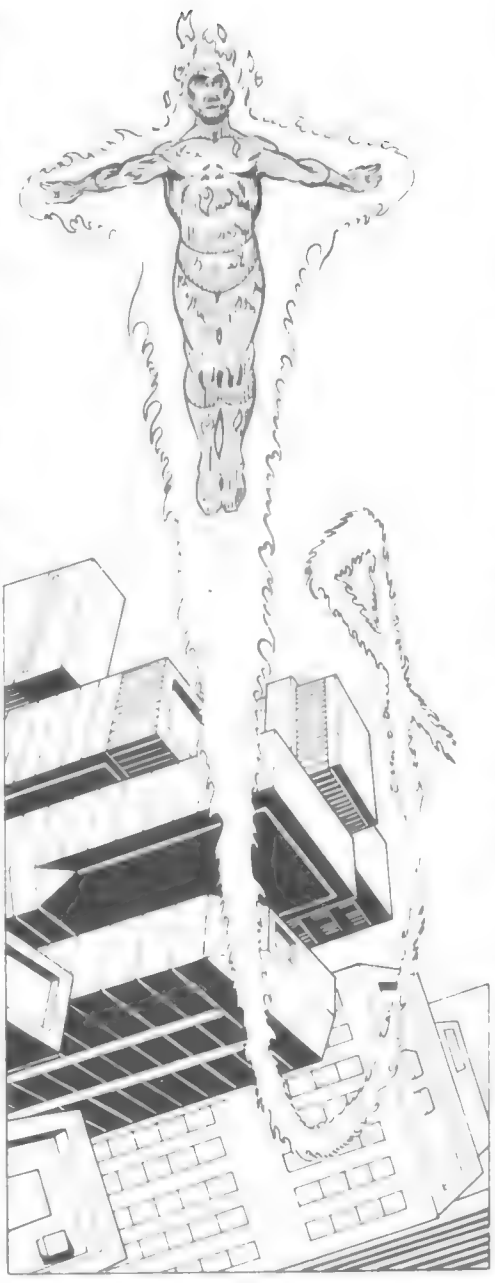
Richards himself was the only link the government had to the other three of the Fantastic Four (hence the codename Mr. Fantastic, the only one of the four not somehow related to his superpower). It would be through him that all information would be channeled, and in the end it would be he who decided which cases to take and which to reject.

Indeed, Reed rejected several possible tasks as too trivial before he found one to suit him. It wasn't until late in August of 1961 that Reed called the others together. This was the case of the Mole Man, and it was documented more or less accurately in *Fantastic Four* #1.

It seemed that atomic plants were vanishing mysteriously on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The authorities were becoming upset, because the only clues were large holes in the ground where the plants used to be. They suspected that either the plants had collapsed into the ground, or they'd flown away. The latter possibility was heavily discounted in most circles because there had been no reports of flying atomic plants, as might be expected should such a thing occur.

Reed tended to agree with this analysis, and so, after receiving pictures and other information about the incidents, he concentrated on the cave-in hypothesis. By studying the information carefully, he was able to pinpoint an island exactly between them, and it was to Monster Island that the Fantastic Four went to find an answer. There they found the macabre Mole Man.

The Mole Man's plot was simple. With the aid of huge, burrowing monsters he would destroy the world's sources of power. Then he would lead his creatures to the surface to kill everything that lived, ultimately avenging himself



---

well, albeit sometime after the 20th.

FANTASTIC FOUR #18 (9/63)
"A Skrull Walks Among Us" 21 pp.

Rounding out the hectic month of June 1963 was the adventure with the Super-Skrull, a little more than a week after Dr. Doom was defeated.

STRANGE TALES (ANNUAL) #2 (1963)
"On the Trail of Spider-Man" 18 pp.

Johnny's identity crisis, displayed in his jealousy of the publicity that Spider-Man was getting, indicates that this adventure happened just before *Strange Tales* #112, marking it in early July 1963.

STRANGE TALES #112 (9/63)
"The Living Bomb" 13 pp.

In this episode of July 1963, the Torch sacrificed his own life to save others. It was his first true crisis. It was fortunate that Reed was able to rekindle Johnny's fires.

FANTASTIC FOUR (ANNUAL) #1 (1963)
"Sub-Mariner vs. the Human Race" 37 pp.

It may be that the FF took an ocean cruise to allow Johnny to recover from his experience in *Strange Tales* #112. If so, then this adventure happened in late July or early August 1963.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #5 (10/63)
"Marked for Destruction by Doctor Doom" 21 pp.

Probably occurring in August 1963, though it may have been September.

AVENGERS #1 (9/63)
"The Coming of the Avengers" 22 pp.

The Avengers were formed in late summer 1963, either late in August or early in September.

FANTASTIC FOUR #19 (10/63)
"Prisoners of the Pharaoh" 22 pp.

Probably occurring early in September 1963.

STRANGE TALES #113 (10/63)
"The Coming of the Plantman" 13 pp.

This was the first appearance of Doris Evans. The Torch had apparently just met the girl, indicating that school had begun again. Hence, this was probably early to middle September 1963.

STRANGE TALES #114 (11/63)
"Captain America" 18 pp.

Probably occurring later in September 1963.

FANTASTIC FOUR #20 (11/63)
"The Mysterious Molecule Man" 22 pp.

Probably occurring early in October 1963.

STRANGE TALES #115 (12/63)
"The Sandman Strikes" 13 pp.

Sue and Ben were still working on the notes from the Molecule Man case, indicating that this story also happened in October 1963.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #8 (1/64)
"Spider-Man Tackles the Torch" 6 pp.

In the last panel of *Strange Tales* #115, Spider-Man grumbled that the town was too small for him and J. Storm. This fight followed soon after in late October or early November 1963.

STRANGE TALES #116 (1/64)
"In the Clutches of the Puppet Master" 13 pp.

Probably occurring in November 1963.

FANTASTIC FOUR #21 (12/63)
"The Hate-Monger" 22 pp.

Probably occurring early in December 1963.

on a world that had shunned him for being ugly.

It was a reasonably direct approach; nevertheless, the FF had no sympathy and thwarted his plans by burying his big monsters in a rockslide. Frustrated, the Mole Man blew up his island and (the FF supposed) himself with it.

Even though their first case had been a spectacular success, there had been an unforeseen problem. The appearance of the Thing and the Torch had been greeted with something less than stirring approbation on the part of the startled citizens of New York. Johnny and Ben had been shot at. Clearly, this was an untenable situation that couldn't be allowed to continue. Hastily, Dr. Richards scheduled a press conference.

Undoubtedly, the fact that Johnny had taken on the same name of the old hero led some people to suspect that he *was* the original Human Torch. Certainly the fact that it was *Ben Grimm* who was the Thing helped the FF to attain instant popularity and sympathy from the public, for Ben Grimm was well known, both as a football star and a war hero. The apparent *menaces* had suddenly taken on familiar faces!

But the fact that the FF had gone public had one serious drawback: it brought them to the immediate attention of the Skrulls. Only recently, the Skrulls had been having trouble with a *single* super-powered foe (3-D Man, of course!). Gripped with an acute case of paranoia, they would make an attempt to nip this new group in the bud—*before* they had a chance to become a threat.

Dick O'Malley writes:

I'm a graduate student in Economics, working on my Ph.D at the University of California at San Diego. I have a B.S. in Economics from the California Institute of Technology. I'm 23 years old, born in Compton, California, on a wintry day in 1955. I've been reading comics since 1957, and began to *collect* ten years later, purely out of a whim to see stories that I'd missed (and not trusting to reprints). I completed my run of Marvel superhero books in 1971, and since then have been content to maintain the collection, only occasionally picking up a few pre-superhero Marvels (or Timely, or Atlas books, if the price is reasonable.

The effort backfired dramatically, as portrayed in *Fantastic Four* #2. Not only had the Skrulls failed to eliminate the Fantastic Four, they'd inadvertently revealed their presence on Earth! Secrecy was essential to their long-range goals, and they had to salvage what they could. It was for this reason that they *led Richards to believe that they planned a military invasion of Earth*.

At this point, the comic differs from what most likely really happened. The comic book portrays Reed and company going up to report to the Skrull commander pretending to be the Skrull agents still disguised as the FF. There, they presented the commander with clippings from Marvel's magazines and declared that they were Earth's secret weapons. Against such incredible secrets the commander saw no hope of success, and so, leaving his "operatives" to remove all traces of Skrull presence, the Skrull fleet fled.

The meeting between Reed and the Skrull commander actually took place—the comic is accurate in this respect—but it is unlikely that Reed sought to deceive him in any way. Surely the Skrulls would have reliable information. If the Skrulls were here for military conquest (as Reed believed), it stood to reason that, lacking the element of surprise, their losses might have been untenable. It would suffice to point out that the Earth would be prepared for them.

Indeed, it apparently *did* suffice. The Skrulls did not attack and, as far as anyone could tell, the left as quickly as they'd come. It was not until some time after Captain Marvel came to Earth that we learned the actual extent of Skrull operations on Earth prior to and after(!) that time.

The first two cases had ended successfully—as far as anyone could tell. The Fantastic Four were well on their way to becoming legend. ■

FANTASTIC FOUR #22 (1/64)

"The Return of the Mole Man" 22 pp.

This probably also happened in December. Strangely, the Mole Man was billed as the first menace the FF ever faced as a *team*. Does this imply that there was a menace that *one* member faced *before* the Mole Man? (The cover of *Fantastic Four* #1 reads "together for the first time in one mighty magazine": another hint that they were apart before?)

STRANGE TALES #119 (4/64)

"The Torch Goes Wild" 13 pp.

We'll get to *Strange Tales* #117 and #118 somewhat later. The headline: "Spider-Man Smashes Crime Ring" would place this adventure shortly after *Spider-Man* #10, in January 1964.

AVENGERS #3 (1/64)

"Sub-Mariner" 23 pp.

Captain America was revived in 1964, not long after this incident. The earliest it could be is January of that year.

FANTASTIC FOUR #23 (2/64)

"The Master Plan of Doctor Doom" 23 pp.

This adventure would have occurred in late January 1964, before the epic clash between the Hulk and the Thing a month later.

FANTASTIC FOUR #24 (3/64)

"The Infant Terrible" 23 pp.

This one had to happen in early February 1964, between Dr. Doom and the Hulk.

FANTASTIC FOUR #25 (4/64)

"The Hulk vs. the Thing" 22 pp.

The Avengers were brought back from Europe by reports that the Hulk had been seen in the Southwest. But they uncovered the drifting body of Captain America along the way. The incidents in *Avengers* #4 followed. In the meantime, the Hulk got word that Cap had replaced him, and came East to fight. It would have been February by the time of *Fantastic Four* #25.

FANTASTIC FOUR #26 (5/64)

"The Avengers Take Over" 23 pp.

This was the second part of the story, continued from the previous issue.

STRANGE TALES #120 (5/64)

"The Torch Meets the Iceman" 14 pp.

A newspaper headline places this adventure shortly after the X-Men's initial clashes with the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, and therefore in February 1964.

STRANGE TALES #121 (6/64)

"Prisoner of the Plantman" 14 pp.

Probably late in February 1964.

STRANGE TALES #122 (7/64)

"3 Against the Torch" 14 pp.

Doom's henchmen from *Fantastic Four* #23 appeared from limbo immediately upon Doom's disappearance into space. Granting them time to make their plans, and noting that they were unaware that Doom had returned, it is logical to put this story in March 1964.

DAREDEVIL #2 (6/64)

"The Evil Menace of Electro" 22 pp.

The FF made a cameo appearance in this March 1964 adventure of the Man Without Fear.

FANTASTIC FOUR #27 (6/64)

"The Search for Sub-Mariner" 23 pp.

Probably occurring late in March 1964.

FANTASTIC FOUR ANNUAL #2 (1964)

"The Final Victory of Dr. Doom" 25 pp.

Even though Doom had returned to Earth very shortly after *Fantastic Four* #23, he required enough time to develop his newest plot. Therefore, this adventure probably happened in early April 1964.

FANTASTIC FOUR #28 (7/64)

"We Have to Fight the X-Men" 22 pp.

Probably occurring in April 1964, definitely after the Torch has met the Iceman.

STRANGE TALES #123 (8/64)

"The Birth of the Beetle" 14 pp.

Probably occurring in late April 1964.

STRANGE TALES #124 (9/64)

"Paste-Pot Pete" 14 pp.

Pete had been freed a month before this adventure, on parole for helping the

Avengers in *Avengers* #6. That fact marks this adventure as occurring in May 1964.

STRANGE TALES #125 (10/64)
"The Sub-Mariner Must Be Stopped" 13 pp.
Probably occurring late in May 1964.

FANTASTIC FOUR #29 (8/64)
"It Started on Yancy Street" 22 pp.
Probably occurring in early June 1964.

STRANGE TALES #126 (11/64)
"Pawns of the Deadly Duo" 13 pp.
The Thinker and the Puppet Master didn't waste much time attacking the FF again. This adventure was probably in June 1964.

STRANGE TALES #127 (12/64)
"The Mystery Villain" 12 pp.
Probably occurring later in June 1964.

FANTASTIC FOUR #30 (9/64)
"The Dreaded Diablo" 22 pp.
This year, instead of a sea cruise, the FF went on to Transylvania. This adventure probably happened in July 1964, the traditional month for FF vacations, it would seem.

STRANGE TALES #117 (2/64)
"The Return of the Eel" 14 pp.
Here, at last, is *Strange Tales* #117. This must have happened about a year after the story in *Strange Tales* #112. There is no conceivable way Leopold Stryke could have been released any earlier than that. Therefore it could have been no earlier than July 1964.

SPIDER-MAN (ANNUAL) #1 (1964)
"The Sinister Six" 41 pp.
This adventure happened later in July 1964.

STRANGE TALES #118 (3/64)
"The Man Who Became the Torch" 13 pp.
Just as *Strange Tales* #117 could have happened no earlier than July, *Strange Tales* #118 could have happened no earlier than August 1964. For one thing, we see in *Fantastic Four* #36 that Paste-Pot Pete had donned the costume he wore in *Strange Tales* #124 by the time of this adventure. For another thing, it is difficult to believe that the Wizard would wait longer than a few months before attacking the FF with his "Frightful Four." It may have occurred even later than this.

STRANGE TALES #130 (3/65)
"Meet the Beatles" 12 pp.
If I remember correctly, the Beatles were in New York early in August 1964. This gives us the strange circumstance of stories occurring within days of each other being published a full year apart.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #17 (10/64)
"The Return of the Green Goblin" 22 pp.
Probably occurring in August 1964 as well.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #18 (11/64)
"The End of Spider-Man" 22 pp.
Soon after *Spider-Man* #17, in late August 1964.

FANTASTIC FOUR #31 (10/64)
"The Mad Menace of the Macabre Mole Man" 21 pp.
Probably occurring in early September 1964.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #19 (12/64)
"Spidey Strikes Back" 22 pp.
This would have been a September 1964 story.

FANTASTIC FOUR #32 (11/64)
"Death of a Hero" 21 pp.
Dr. Storm has been back in prison for a time, hence the story probably occurs in late September or early October 1964.

STRANGE TALES #131 (4/65)
"The Bouncing Ball of Doom" 12 pp.
As the calendar on the wall behind the Mad Thinker flicks off the days, we see Tuesday, October 6; Friday, October 9; and Friday, October 16 roll by. Conveniently enough, the only year that happened was 1964.

FANTASTIC FOUR #33 (12/64)
"Side-by-Side with Sub-Mariner" 20 pp.
Probably occurring in early November 1964.

STRANGE TALES #128 (1/65)
"Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch" 12 pp.
Probably in early November 1964, during the time Quicksilver and Wanda were first beginning to think seriously of abandoning Magneto.

FANTASTIC FOUR #34 (1/65)
"A House Divided" 20 pp.
Probably occurring in November 1964.

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #21 (2/65)
"Where Flies the Beetle" 21 pp.
This was the first time Johnny Storm ever met Peter Parker. It probably happened in December 1964.

STRANGE TALES #129 (2/65)
"The Terrible Trio" 12 pp.
This follows *Spider-Man* #21 almost immediately, and so would also occur in December 1964.

AVENGERS #13 (2/65)
"The Castle of Count Nefaria" 20 pp.
The FF makes a brief cameo appearance.

FANTASTIC FOUR #35 (2/65)
"Calamity on the Campus" 20 pp.
With ESU in session, and Peter Parker investigating the campus, it seems pretty clear that this was January 1965. It was definitely winter weather.

FANTASTIC FOUR #36 (3/65)
"The Frightful Four" 20 pp.
Reed and Sue wasted no time before announcing their engagement. This adventure, too, was in January 1965.

FANTASTIC FOUR #37 (4/65)
"Behold! A Distant Star" 20 pp.
This adventure was months after *Fantastic Four* #32, probably occurring in February 1965.

STRANGE TALES #132 (5/65)
"The Sinister Space Trap"
The story in *Fantastic Four* #37 is a subject of comment, implying that it occurred recently. This adventure probably happened early in March 1965.

STRANGE TALES #133 (6/65)
"The Terrible Toys" 12 pp.
If this story actually happened, it would have been between *Strange Tales* #132 and *Fantastic Four* #38, in late March 1965.

FANTASTIC FOUR #38 (5/65)
"Defeated by the Frightful Four" 20 pp.
Probably occurring in April 1965. It was just before Daredevil's clash with the Sub-Mariner, and just before the new Avengers took over from the old crew.

FANTASTIC FOUR #39 (6/65)
"A Blind Man Shall Lead Them" 20 pp.
This would have been in late April 1965.

FANTASTIC FOUR #40 (7/65)
"The Battle of the Baxter Building" 20 pp.
The second part of the previous story, leading directly into the next issue.

FANTASTIC FOUR #41 (8/65)
"The Brutal Betrayal of Ben Grimm" 20 pp.
The first part of the Frightful Five Story, still in late April 1965.

FANTASTIC FOUR #42 (9/65)
"To Save You, Why Must I Kill You?" 20 pp.
Part two.

FANTASTIC FOUR #43 (10/65)
"Lo, There Shall Be an Ending" 20 pp.
Part Three. Dr. Doom's hands take longer to heal than a "few days," though.

X-MEN #13 (9/65)
"Where Walks the Juggernaut" 20 pp.
Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch have not yet had time to join the Avengers, so this story must have happened in early May 1965.

STRANGE TALES #134 (7/65)
"The Challenge of the Watcher" 12 pp.
If Kang went immediately from King Arthur's time to seek vengeance upon the FF for disrupting his plans, this incident must have happened late in May 1965.

FANTASTIC FOUR (ANNUAL) #3 (1965)
"Bedlam at the Baxter Building" 23 pp.
Who could believe that Susan Storm wouldn't want to be married in June?

Again, I would appreciate comments and corrections if anyone has any. Please send your notes to:

Dick O'Malley
4085 Nobel Dr. #3
San Diego, CA 92122

Collector's Dream Interview

The following interview took place about a year ago between Dick O'Malley—representing Collector's Dream *—and the irascible Johnny Storm, better known in his professional identity as the Human Torch, member of the Fantastic Four. This exclusive interview cleared up—well, sort of cleared up—many troublesome points of conflict between what really happened in the Marvel Universe in late 1961 and what was reported to have happened in the comics, and we are presenting it in its entirety as part of our feature article.*

Collector's Dream.: We're pleased to be speaking with the Human Torch, the youngest member of the Fantastic Four. Mr. Storm, as—

Johnny Storm.: Johnny, please.

CD.: Thank you. Johnny, as the youngest member of the oldest super-team in the Marvel Universe, you doubtless see things there in a way nobody else can.

JS.: I don't know that that's true. I'm not that young, any more, anyway.

CD.: True enough. You seem slightly older than they picture you in the comics.

JS.: I was 16 years old in '63—you can check it out in Marvel's first annual. It certainly doesn't take an Andy Libby to figure our that I'm on the wrong side of 30. It's a funny thing—Lee started out making me older in the comics, now he makes me younger. Full circle, I guess.

CD.: What do you think was the reason for that?

JS.: Format. Formula. Comics are like TV in that if something sells, you don't change it—you don't *want* to, anyway, because you don't know if the new format'll sell as well.

CD.: That in mind, how accurate *are* the comics?

JS.: Oh, *very*! Reed insists on it. Change a few names here, a bit of dramatic license there, but make sure the *stories* are right.

CD.: Have there ever been stories printed in the mag that *were* complete fabrications?

JS.: Sure. Not many, but you don't get a menace *every* month in real life.

CD.: Really. Which stories *were* they?

JS.: Guess! (Laughs) No, seriously, they're not that hard to spot, are they? Lee and Kirby—Kirby in particular when he started doing the plots himself—were never that good at *fabricating* stories. Great biographers, lousy writers. Later on it gets harder to tell, though.

CD.: So you're not going to say?

JS.: No, why should I? Marvel likes to pretend that everything they put out really happens. Maybe it does, and I'm just BS-ing you with this answer, huh?

CD.: Yet there are some obvious falsifications. We just remarked on your age a while back. It's the same story with your sister. In FF #11 it states that she grew up with Reed.

JS.: That's true, amazingly enough. So did I!

CD.: *What?*

JS.: What's your question, Dick?

CD.: Ah...I was wondering how it would be possible for Susan to grow up with a man old enough to be her father. Isn't that a mistake?

JS.: No. Think harder.

CD.: Johnny, it *has* to be a mistake. Look at FF #31, and FF #81. Sue isn't very much older than you in the former, and in the latter Crystal states that Susan wasn't yet *21* when she became the Invisible Girl. But Reed had graduated from college by the time World War II broke out.

JS.: Not correct. It was no mistake, but it *was* purposely misleading. In fact, Sue *was* 21 in '61—*just* (she'll kill me when she sees this) and Reed was an old

Illustrations by Jim Craig

With: Johnny Storm

© 1978 Johnny Storm

man at, um, 40, I think. But if you'll bother to think about it, you'll realize that this wasn't the sort of thing you could put into *comic books* in those days. Marvel had been getting letters—not many, of course—asking why Reed was fooling around with a girl who had a teen-age kid brother. They made her older, and I guess that's one of the reasons they made *me* older. It makes a kind of sense, I guess.

CD.: But you say you grew up with Reed.

JS.: If you'll look at #11, you'll also find the statement that Reed and Sue were next-door neighbors. *That's* true. Reed was a sort of extra *uncle* to us. Kind of like Mr. Wilson in the *Dennis the Menace* strip, with me as Dennis. Only Dennis *likes* Mr. Wilson, and I *never* liked Reed. (Laughs)

CD.: This is very confusing. Then why didn't Reed recognize your father in #31?

JS.: He did, really. But think about it. The reader wasn't *supposed* to know who the mystery man was. It was supposed to be a surprise. *You're* a writer, ask yourself how you write a mystery if you give the mystery away on page *three.*

CD.: I see, I think. And I think I see why Stan and Jack didn't tell the *real* story, too.

JS.: Do you? (Laughs) And how do you know that what I just *told* you is true?

CD.: It seems to make sense, and why the Sub-Mariner turned her head so easily, and why she was so dependent on your brother-in-law for so long. It also might explain why you're so hostile to Reed so often. *Is* it true?

JS.: It's a better *story*. I wasn't aware that you'd had training in psychology, Dick.

CD.: No more than you. Let's get on to another topic. You and your sister make a marvelous psychological engineering team. You're very well suited for each other.

JS.: I've always thought so. Why do you *say* so?

CD.: Let's go back to the origin of the FF. How, exactly, did you and Sue convince Reed to take you along, assuming it wasn't *his* idea?

JS.: Heck, *that* was one of the easiest con jobs Susie and I'd ever pulled off. She's learned a lot since then, but she *needed* me back then. She argued with Reed loud enough to wake me up, and, well, I sort of told Reed that either he took me along too, or I'd snitch.

CD.: You were *how* old at the time?

JS.: Fourteen—or maybe *almost* fourteen.

CD.: That's ... pretty amazing.

JS.: Yeah. It is, isn't it?

CD.: I'm beginning to wonder if we're going to get a straight answer out of you.

JS.: Really, Dick. That's the way it happened. Honestly! You don't think Reed would take two *kids* along—even one he thought he was in love with—unless he *had* to. (Laughs)

CD.: One might ask why he'd even tell Sue in the first place.

JS.: One might, he agreed.

CD.: Well?

JS.: Why not? If you ask me, one of the reasons he wanted to *do* it was to *impress* her. He thought he was in love—I guess he wanted to get her permission or something. Love's funny that way. How should *I* know why? Ask *him*!

CD.: So you stung him, and Sue plunged the barb home.

JS.: Yeah, she picked it up from there. "Pushed the right buttons," you might say, after I pointed out where they were.

CD.: You make a good team. You did the same thing to Ben Grimm a few days later.

JS.: I...

CD.: Oh, jeez, I'm sorry, Johnny.

JS.: No, it's okay. Ben's learned to live with it. We've all grown up a little bit since then, I guess. Some of us less than others.

CD.: We can take that out.

JS.: No, leave it in. Go on.

"Sometimes I wish I could just settle down and raise a family..."

CD.: I was going to go into the way the FF was set up. What the government did. That kind of stuff.

JS.: First of all, the "pocket" rocket didn't officially exist. It's not possible to prosecute someone for stealing something that doesn't exist. But they *could* have gotten Reed through more devious means. Sue, Ben, and I were pretty much in the clear—Reed was the one in a tight spot. He was lucky to have a couple of things to trade.

CD.: Which were ...?

JS.: The data on the cosmic storm, and us! He put it more delicately, though. That's how the Fantastic Four was born; not that melodramatic scene in the comics where we all put our hands together, but because Sue wanted to be with Reed, because Sue wanted me there, and because poor Ben didn't really have any other choice. There wasn't really much idealism in it at the beginning—that would come later. In the beginning we fought a lot and got on each other's nerves. And most of it was *my* fault. Dennis the Menace as a teenager. I still don't understand why Ben put up with me for so long.

CD.: How long was it until the first case?

JS.: You already know that if you know when my birthday was. The first case was in August, so just track backwards.

CD.: We don't know when your birthday was.

JS.: It's classified.

CD.: So were *you* for a while.

JS.: True. The *Strange Tales* stories did not err in stating that I had a secret identity. The third issue of the FF erred in having me appear in public! You might ask yourself why Reed and Sue would drag Ben and me along on a date—particularly when I had to go to school in the morning.

CD.: So why were you the only member of the foursome to have a "secret identity"?

JS.: Because Reed decided (and Sue agreed) that I ought to be leading as normal a life as possible. I saw the sense in it, I suppose, but it still tended to bother me that nobody knew I was the Torch. A lot of people thought I was the *original* Torch come back again, but Reed told them I *wasn't*—which was probably a mistake.

CD.: Why so?

JS.: Because it didn't take too much intelligence to figure out that the Invisible Girl's brother was the Torch after I started operating on my own in Glenville. We both lived there, and everybody knew who *Sue* was. Two and two *still* don't make three, if you see what I mean.

CD.: Then you were aware at the time that you were essentially giving your identity away.

JS.: I didn't say that.

CD.: It doesn't matter, anyway. You started operating in Glenville about a year after the FF started, and about six months later everybody knew who you were—not just the few people that you'd told in the beginning. Why did you start this? Did you really think you could maintain the secret for long?

JS.: The reason I started operating on my own was that Reed was being too selective. In that first year he only took on *two* cases: there was the Mole Man incident, and that bit with the hypnotist—the Miracle Man he called himself. All the other cases were *thrust* upon us. Pretty blasted conservative when you figure all the crime that's going on. So when the Ant-Man popped up, and Thor started getting in the papers, Reed wasn't about to stop me—not that he would have tried—and I wasn't about to stop. When you think about it, you realize that I was the only member of the FF that *could* have acted effectively on his own. Sue and Ben could *now*, but that wasn't true in 1962—all Sue could do was disappear, and Ben wasn't familiar enough—he would have had the same problems Iron Man had a few months later until he gilded his armor.

COLLECTOR'S DREAM AD RATES

Ad Size Width × Height	Price
⅛ Page (2½" × 5")	$15
¼ Page (3½" × 5")	$25
⅓ Page (5" × 5")	$30
⅓ Page (2½" × 10")	$30
½ Page (7½" × 5")	$40
Full Page (7½" × 10")	$75
Inside Back Cover	$130
Inside Front Cover	$135
Back Cover	$150

All ads must be VERTICAL, BLACK AND WHITE, CAMERA-READY and SIZED. Ad space may be reserved in advance of publication; drop us a line and we will tell you when we need your ad. Screening of photographs and reduction can be done for $4.00 extra. If the same ad is to appear more than once, there is no charge for screening or reduction after the first time.

NO MESSY OR OTHERWISE UNATTRACTIVE ADS WILL BE ACCEPTED. This includes cross-outs, super-dense typing, unclear handwriting. If you type your ad, be sure it is as BLACK AS POSSIBLE. If in our printer's opinion an ad will not reproduce clearly, we will not waste your money printing it.

Please do not send NEGATIVES. They are a pain to strip in. Also, ads which we print cannot be returned.

DISCOUNTS: Repeat advertisers may take a 5% discount off the total cost of their ads if they are prepaid. Should you want to change your ad without changing its printed size, this still counts as a repeat ad.

Our typesetting services will transform ordinary-looking price lists and texts into beautifully legible pieces that will be real treats to read. All charges are based on the average amount and size of type that is found in the pages of *Collector's Dream*. When sending ad copy for typesetting, you must provide all extras such as logos and emblems. Typesetting prices arranged on request, and are in addition to the ad rates quoted above.

"When you think about it, you realize that I was the only member of the FF that could have acted effectively on his own."

CD.: So you thought that fighting crime was more important than preserving anonymity?
JS.: That's a nice way to put it, yes. And I *tried* to keep it a secret for as long as I could.
CD.: Then Carl Zante, the Acrobat, showed up at the Storm residence, asking for the Torch.
JS.: Yes. (Laughs) Sue just glared at me for *days* after that! The next *month* they still hadn't forgiven me. So I decided to take on Namor by *myself*. The foolhardiness of youth—we nearly killed each other.
CD.: Okay. Let's go back a bit. The Skrulls attacked you for no apparent reason. Your second recorded case.
JS.: It was a long time before we ever knew why. It was what humans would call paranoia. It seems that just months before they'd had to deal with a superpowered human, the 3-D Man. He'd caused them a great deal of trouble, and they hoped to nip the four of us in the bud. The whole thing backfired on them.
CD.: You imply that the Skrulls had been here for quite some time?
JS.: We don't know *how* long the Skrulls have been here. We don't even know that they're *gone*! They can take on any form they *want* to. *You* might be a Skrull. The *bed* might be one. Your *tape recorder*! (Laughs) Seriously, they tried as hard as they could to convince us they were the *first* of an invasion force once their cover was blown. They wanted, above all else, for us to think that they had never been here before. Cutting their losses. Reed *bought* part of the story for a long time, because there was no evidence to the contrary until very recently. Mar-Vell knew some things we didn't.
CD.: The end of that story was rather far-fetched. Was Mr. Fantastic really so credulous as to believe he could trick the Skrulls with clippings from monster comics?
JS.: Hardly! (Laughs) Stan and Jack put that in to plug their other comics, and Reed thought it was so funny he left it it. What really happened was *this*: we captured the three Skrulls (one getting away), cleared ourselves, and *then* met with the Skrull commander. Since the Skrulls no longer had any element of surprise, the losses they would have taken made it no longer worth their while to attack (we thought, not knowing that they had no *intention* of conducting military operations to *begin* with). But try to explain that to a twelve-year-old.
CD.: You weren't surprised to see Super-Skrull.
JS.: No. We expected something eventually. From what we'd learned of them, the Skrulls appeared to be an unforgiving, vengeful people. We really thought we'd disrupted their plans. What surprised us was that it was nearly two years until we saw them again. And even then, it didn't seem that the Skrull was after *us* in particular, even if he *did* copy our powers.
CD.: You made one other semi-public appearance before your identity was revealed. This was in FF #7.
JS.: That was a government dinner.
CD.: And the government knew who you were.
JS.: Yeah. There were a *lot* of people who knew who I was. It just never got into the papers for various reasons. I thought we'd covered this already.
CD.: Just checking my notes. There are only a couple more questions I have here.
JS.: Shoot.
CD.: How did the name Mr. Fantastic come about? Yours is obvious—so are the Thing and the Invisible Girl. Reed's isn't.
JS.: It was his *code* name. We were the Fantastic Four, he was Mr. Fantastic, because he was the one the government went through to get to the team. It stuck because it's more dignified than Stretcho or Putty Man.
CD.: Do you have regrets about becoming the Torch?
JS.: Sure. Sometimes I wish I could just settle down somewhere and raise a family. But it's not something you can escape—when I get hot under the collar, it's *literal*. But I don't think I'll discuss it further.
CD.: Not necessary. You've already told us more than we'd hoped to get—even if some of it was total fabrication.
JS.: It *was*.
CD.: Hmm. Well, thanks for your time.
JS.: You're welcome. *Flame on!*
CD.: And as the Torch singes away the hair on my right hand and blazes off into the distance, we bid adieu to the Marvel Universe. ■

A Checklisting Approach For Comic Fans

© 1978 Stan Molson

by Stan Molson

Very few comic collectors maintain useful records of the comics they own and the comics they are looking for. Having observed comic collectors for several years, I can safely say that most do not know how to organize a useful checklist of the comics in which they are interested. Perhaps the reason for this is that no one has ever presented any guidelines dealing with this very simple, but quite important, aspect of comic collecting. The purpose of this brief article is to describe a simple yet highly efficient method of documenting the details of a large comic book collection in a usable form. A "how-to" essay such as this one shouldn't really be necessary, but it appears that comic fandom has overlooked the need to discuss some of the most common and basic problems of this hobby. Even the very comprehensive front pages of the *Price Guide* do not deal with this topic.

The approach to be described here was prepared with comic collector requirements in mind. However, the techniques could equally well be used for any collector's items which are numbered, such as gum cards, stamps (using Scott catalogue numbers) and many other small collectibles.

Importance of Checklisting Comics

Comic fans who walk around dealers' rooms trying to locate the items they need solely "by eye" are no doubt already questioning my implication that having *written* data is important. However, the advantages of a good checklist are almost unlimited. Hopefully, this article will persuade those who never pick up a pencil that maybe they are missing something.

The most important reason for compiling a summary of the comics a collector already owns is that buying additional books can be done much more intelligently. For example, assume a collector who is converging on a complete set of *Conans* encounters a dealer with a supply of these books. The collector needs either #2 or #3 to complete his set, but cannot remember for sure which one; the dealer has a copy of both on display at $15 each. If he picks the wrong one, he will have paid $15 for a book for which the dealer might pay him only $5 if he sells it back to him, since buying and selling prices are frequently far apart; but more important, the number the collector *did* need could easily have been sold to someone else before the error is discovered. In other words, errors caused by relying on memory can prove expensive and aggravating.

A checklist which tells the fan at a glance whether or not he needs a book can be equally handy when buying from a fanzine ad. Most ads are just sequences of numbers, and without a quick reference at hand the collector would be forced to wade through the actual books on his shelf to find out if he should be ordering an issue quoted. The list would both save physical labor and reduce the time required to decide on a purchase and place an order.

Want list preparation is much simpler for the collector with up to date records of his holdings. Often people with comics for sale do not prepare detailed for sale lists; they just ask anyone who is interested to request specific needs. Such ads are easy to reply to if the collector has a neat summary which can be converted directly into a want list or photocopied.

In addition to simplifying collection expansion, the detailed checklist can help the collector enjoy what he already has. For example, articles written by comic fans occasionally describe a comic's special artists or noteworthy features of which the reader may not be aware. If the fan wants to dig out the comic referred to to see these features, it is convenient to be able to glance at a list to determine if the book is available before going to the trouble of tracking it down.

Few collectors actually know exactly how many books they own, since comics can be awkward to count, especially if they are stored in several different places. If one has a complete listing, this task is greatly simplified, since (by using the checklist page layout to be described in this article) the comics are counted practically automatically. The number of books in a collection may not in itself be an interesting fact, but comparing it to the number of comics in a complete set of the titles can provide very interesting percentage-complete ratios which reflect success in acquiring the books one needs. This, in turn, can be used to compare the total amount one has spent in some period of time to the number of books by which the collection has increased, to determine the average cost paid per comic.

A checklist can also be structured to provide general comic book data without having to resort to the *Price Guide*. For example, if a collector collects all titles of a given publisher, his checklist will always be a complete summary of all titles that publisher has printed; such a summary would be tedious to prepare from the *Price Guide*, since it is one large alphabetical sequence not sorted by publisher. If one buys the current issues of all titles, one will also always know how many issues have been published, since the latest ones will always be recorded in the checklist.

A few other minor benefits also come to mind. If a comic collection is ever destroyed or stolen, the checklist could be invaluable for determining any insurance claims or tax losses for which the collector is eligible. Periodic comparison of the actual comic collection to the list could uncover books which might be misplaced or "borrowed" and not returned. Furthermore, an accurate graded list would be highly beneficial to a collector planning to sell his collection to a dealer. It is very easy to Overstreet-value a collection from a graded list; knowing a collection's approximate retail value in advance would be an excellent check on the reasonableness of any dealer offers. Finally, most dealers would probably allow a better price to a collector who is liquidating if presented with a complete inventory listing (i.e., the graded list) which could be used by the dealer for easy pricing and selling.

Considering the points covered in the preceding discussion, it should be obvious that a large-scale comic collector not maintaining a good checklist could easily be hurting himself financially and limiting the amount of enjoyment he extracts from the hobby. Assuming that you are now convinced that a checklist is a good idea, the balance of this article should demonstrate that the amount of effort required to set up and maintain such a list is small in relation to the accrued benefits.

Why This Particular Method?

I have always been intrigued by the problems of comic book documentation and have experimented with numerous formats over the years. I now claim to have developed the ideal approach! The special advantages of the approach to be discussed can be summarized as follows:

1) Minimizes the amount of effort required to record collection additions, and no great effort is required

to set up the list initially.

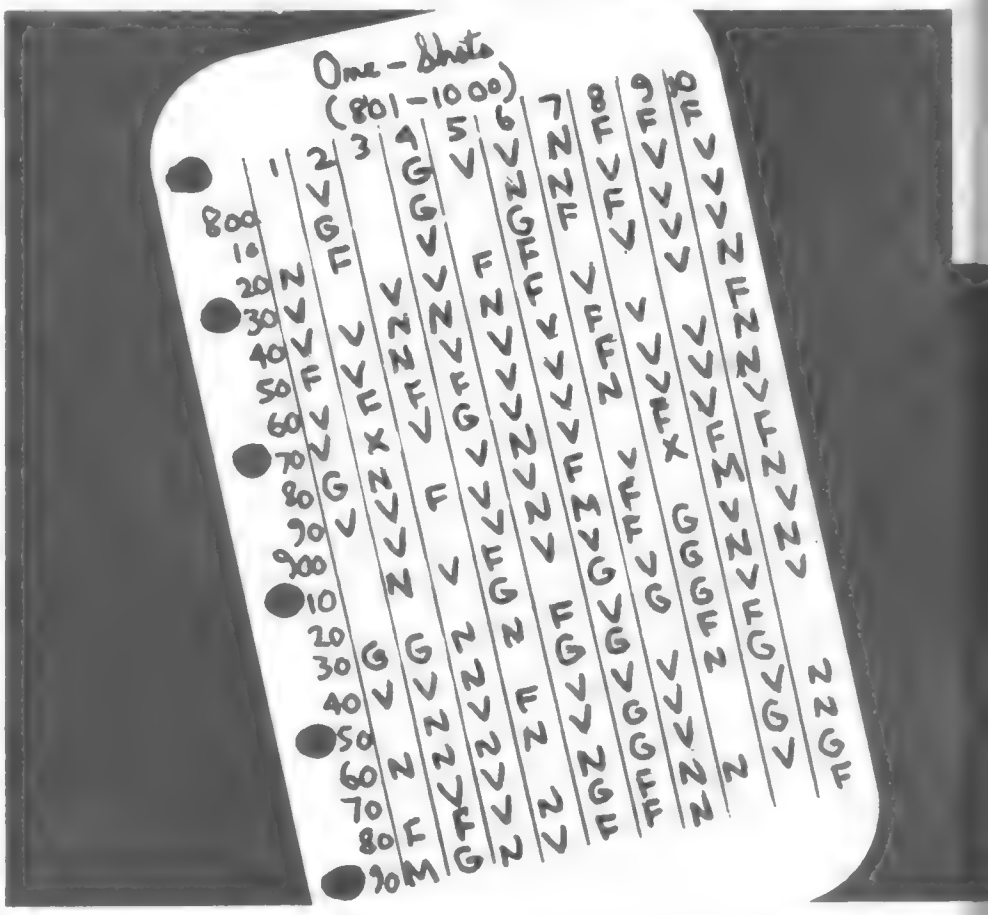
2) Minimizes the chance of errors creeping into the checklist.
3) Maximizes flexibility in adding new titles and re-arranging titles.
4) Maximizes the amount of detail that can be conveyed in a brief list.
5) Provides speedy retrieval when searching for information in the list.
6) Gives a clear definition of what the collector is attempting to complete and the size of the target.

Summarily, although it is very simple to set up *some* kind of a checklist, I feel you are unlikely to come up with one more efficient than the model I am about to describe.

General Approach

Collectors have historically employed two broad approaches to comic checklisting: the "need" list and the "have" list. The "need" list, wherein a collector writes down the books he is looking for, is a very inefficient approach. This method at first glance might seem to be the best way, but after some thought its weak points become very apparent. At first sight, it seems that it would make no difference if a collector who has about half of a set of *Action Comics* listed the 240 or so he needs rather than the 240 he already has. However, the big problem with listing the issues needed is that no information is stored in the list concerning the issues already collected—notably the condition of the books. This can be important if this *Action* collector, like most collectors, operates an "upgrading" collection in which he continually seeks copies in better condition than those he already has. One approach to avoid this difficulty would be to include an auxilliary section on the "need" list to record those copies in lesser condition. But what is "lesser" condition? Any obviously defective books would be in need of upgrading. But what about half-decent, but not great, "good" copies? Many collectors would likely be interested in acquiring "near mint" replacements for any so-so "good" comics they already own. In other words, a collector *really* needs to know the exact condition of everything he has, if he wants to make intelligent decisions in the dealers' room at a convention. For this reason, I suggest that a "need" list is practically useless as a checklisting technique because it contains no information about books already owned, and such information is often very important.

Besides the loss of much information by listing "needed" books rather than owned books, there will always be doubts gnawing away in the collector's mind as to whether or not the list is complete. This is especially true if you are interested, as I am, in Dell comics. There are so many "one-shots" and non-recurring issues that a comprehensive collector of, say, Disney comics could never be 100% sure that he has them all listed on a "need" list. For example, if an obscure item such as the 1955 *Donald Duck in Disneyland* was not listed as a "need" by a Disney fan, he would never be able to tell on looking at the list whether he actually has the book or that he just failed to list it. There are so many unusual items in all categories of comics which collectors save, that I fail to see how any large-scale collector could ever be certain that a "need" list was truly comprehensive.



Because of the importance of knowing details of condition and the impossibility of being sure a "need" list is complete, it seems imperative that a collector *must* use a "have" list, the other of the two basic checklist formats, to make intelligent decisions. Even if one disagrees with the detailed checklist format to be described shortly, I think one will have to agree that the "have" approach is unavoidable.

Another broad principle applied in the checklist advocated here is avoiding simply listing a series of numbers and then stroking them out as the books are obtained. This method stores no information on the condition of the books obtained. The approach I advocate does not require all the numbers to be written out, but instead uses a "positional" notation," to be discussed in the next section, which notes the condition of each comic owned.

Setting up the Checklist

As many readers peruse this section they will immediately be reminded of "Collector Cards," a sort of pre-printed checklist which is advertised frequently in the adzines. My checklist approach is similar to that implemented in those cards, but after watching a few collectors juggling them at conventions, I feel the checklist I am about to outline is superior to and even less expensive than "Collector Cards."

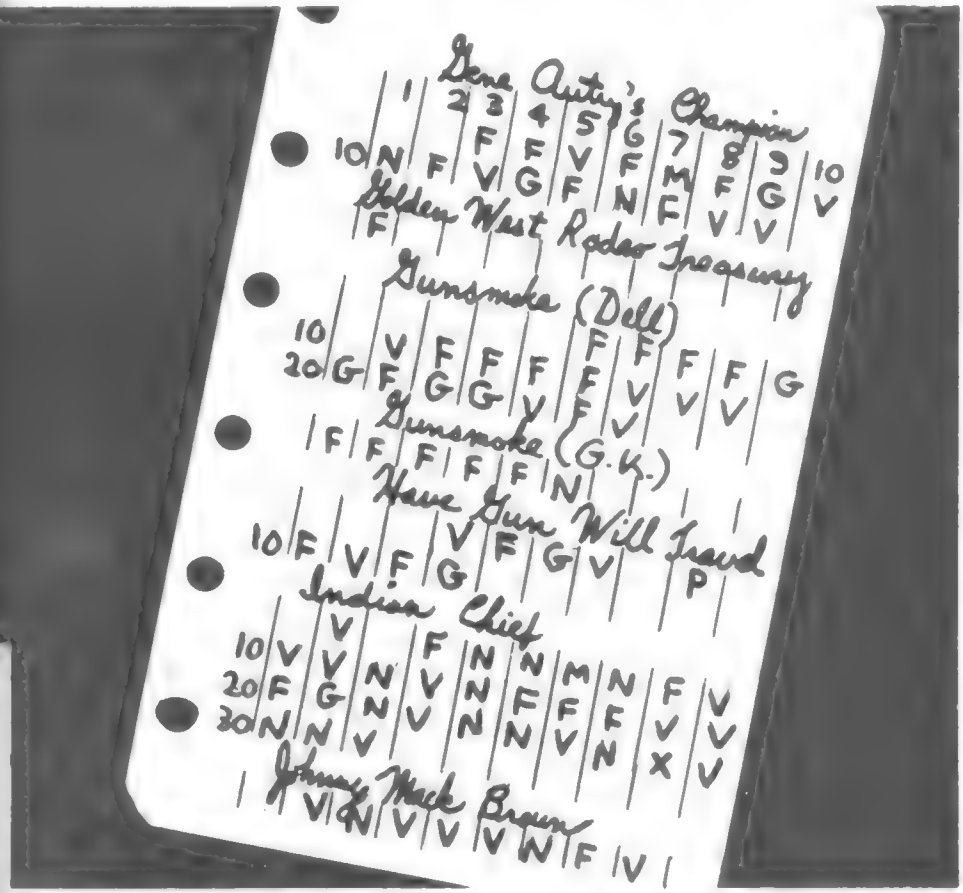
I recommend using small notebook pages, stored in the corresponding six-ring looseleaf book. It is important that very small size pages (3" by 5") be used, since it is extremely handy at conventions to have a book which can be carried in a shirt pocket. It is a nuisance to have to carry a large book in one hand when you should have both hands free to dig through boxes of comics! Furthermore, having to set the book down occasionally rather than putting it in the pocket increases the chances of losing it.

It's best to invest the $2 or so to buy the proper-sized looseleaf book rather than using a bound book or anything else one might have handy. The book must be looseleaf so that new titles can be set up on separate pages and inserted in proper sequence as they begin. It will also occasionally be necessary to re-

arrange page sequences or revise certain pages, and without the looseleaf feature this is impossible. This format is superior to full-size pages or a bound book for a checklist since it can always be revised and need never be completely redone.

The pages themselves are extremely simple to prepare. The first step is to rule ten vertical columns on each page; this can be done in a few seconds if you use a little plastic drafting tool called a "lettering guide," available in book stores for about 75¢. Using a lettering guide, no measuring or ruler is needed to construct the quarter inch vertical columns, since it has holes ¼" apart, designed for speedy ruling with a hard pencil.

This completed, enter the column headings 1,2,3,...,9,10 across the top of each page in ink.



The creative step is to decide how to allocate the titles to be indexed on the pages in the checklist. If one collects only a modest number of titles, it is well-advised to set up a separate page for each title, to allow maximum flexibility. More ambitious collectors who collect numerous comic titles will probably have to allocate several titles to a page, or else plan on filling more than one small binder with checklist pages.

The question each collector will have to ask himself is how he wants the titles to be sequenced in the book. The simplest approach would be to arrange all collected titles alphabetically throughout the book, the same way the *Price Guide* arranges its contents. Another approach would be to classify titles into categories (such as by publisher) and then list each category as a separate alphabetical sequence. Being primarily a Dell and Gold Key comic collector, I prefer to classify all of their titles by topics (Disneys, Westerns, science-fiction, Hanna-Barberas and some 15 others) and sort each of these sub-groups alphabetically. The checklist will be most useful for one's particular needs if the initial plan is well thought out. In any case, if each title is placed on a separate page, or only a few titles on a page, it is relatively easy to re-arrange the looseleaf pages if it is later decided that a different layout will fit one's needs better. Using only one side of each sheet, by the way, makes re-sequencing simpler.

Factors in deciding on an overall layout sequence are fairly straightforward. The method of using one big alphabetical sequence is most useful when confronted with a dealer's mixed stack of comics to check against the list. On the other hand, having the books sorted by category can be more versatile when comparing the list to a dealer's stock which is also sorted by type of comic. Furthermore, it is nice if groups of index pages can be quickly related to the grouping structure used when storing one's collection.

Many collectors will have to record more than one title per page to keep the list to a reasonable size. How many lines should be left for each title? The best way to solve this problem is to forecast how many issues will emerge in some forseeable future period (say five years) and allow at least that much space. For example, *Conan* is currently up to #90 and is published monthly. Therefore, it will be at least #150 in five years; so allow at least fifteen lines (ten comics per line) for this comic. For titles which have been long discontinued, of course no allowance for future issues need be provided.

As new titles are initiated by the comic companies, it will become necessary either to add a new page or to add the title to an existing page to keep the checklist alphabetic. Occasionally a new title will commence, which, strictly speaking, should be set up in the middle of an existing page in your checklist to maintain perfect alphabetic fluency, but there maybe is no room on the page to locate it. Then the collector has two alternatives: to redesign the existing page to make room for the new title, or to record the title on a new page, slightly out of alphabetical order. I have found this latter approach to be quite acceptable; a title might finish in a slightly different location than a strict observation of alphabetical sequencing would dictate, but the title will never be too far away from its proper spot to cause pinpointing problems when looking it up. Some titles will necessarily span more than one page, since small notebook pages can hold only about two hundred data items on their twenty lines.

Keep headings for the comic titles brief; a checklist is not the place to store extensive artist and story data—Overstreet's *Price Guide* has most of this information already. A checklist is intended as a description of your personal holdings, not of the books in general. Short forms should be used for brevity and simplicity, provided they will not create confusion when you look at the page at some future date.

Additional information you *may* want to record might be certain Overstreet values. As previously mentioned, a checklist is most malleable if prepared only on the right-hand side of each page. Thus, whenever the book is opened, there will be a blank left-hand page for miscellaneous memos. I have found it useful to note *Guide* prices (for any one condition, since the three conditions listed are generally in a 1:2:3 ratio, making extrapolation easy) on the facing left-hand page directly across from missing numbers on which there is a good chance of being overcharged by a dealer. Suspected overpricing can be detected without having to pull out a *Price Guide* in front of the dealer, if one has his checklist open.

Entering Information on the Checklist

As referred to briefly earlier, my checklist pages as described in this article use a "positional notation" which allows the collector to record that he has a certain issue number of a comic without ever writing that number out in full. A blank position simply means than no copy of that number is owned; a letter in that position means that a copy is owned of that number, in the condition represented by the letter. This is probably the simplest and most straightforward method of describing comics that could be devised, yet I have yet to see anyone else using it.

The positions are interpreted as follows. The first horizontal row under each title heading is used for numbers 1 through 10 of a title. In the left-hand margin is noted in ink the last number used in the row above it. The second horizontal row is used for issues 11 through 20. The numbers 1 through 10 inked across the top and the cumulative numbers noted in the left-hand margin can be used to get the bearings of any number in the table. Sound simple? It is. Extremely simple. And, at least as efficient as any other notational system. Overstreet's scale of comic conditions is as good as any; though his terminology has been criticized by some, the various conditions have to be called *something*. As long as all participants use the terms consistently, no confusion will result. I do not propose to discuss how to grade comics since assumedly most readers are already up on this or can look it up in the *Price Guide* (or *Collector's Dream* #1!); I've abbreviated Overstreet's conditions as follows:

M - Mint
N - Near Mint
F - Fine
V - Very Good
G - Good
X - Fair
P - Poor

These are *not* the commonly used abbreviations. More frequently used by dealers are forms such as "NM," "Fn," "Vg," "Fr," Etc. While they phonetically suggest the full words better than do my symbols, it is best to have a single letter representing each condition, rather than 2 or 3-letter abbreviations. It's easier to enter a single letter in a checklist position than it is to record a longer abbreviation. Using "X" for "Fair" avoids the confusion which sometimes results from the fact that "Fair" and "Fine" both start with an "F."

On the other hand, collectors inclined to more graphic representations might consider using not letters but *pictures* for condition. An empty box would denote no copy, a box with a dot a poor copy, one with a stroke a fair copy, and so forth, up to a completely filled box, which would denote a mint copy. As a book is upgraded, the picture can be progressively filled in. This scheme avoids having to erase the old notation when an upgraded copy is located.

For comic collectors who have access to more sophisticated data management systems, a single letter condition code could prove quite convenient. For example, if each comic book can be represented by one letter, 80 comics can be recorded on a single 80-column punched card!

"Getting together a high quality checklist can be done at little cost and at little effort."

It should be obvious that the actual letters recorded for each condition should be entered *in pencil*. Thus if one acquires a copy in superior condition in the future, the previous entry can be easily erased and the new copy's condition recorded. Eraseability is also essential if one sells or otherwise disposes of certain comics in the collection and is obliged to remove them from the book.

Collectors sometimes acquire comics which are in nice condition but are "Canadian editions." Generally, these are undesirable in quality and the collector will continue to seek the U.S. version, viewing the Canadian edition as merely a space-filler. Such copies might be denoted squeezing a small "C" in the position of any number which falls into this category.

Miscellaneous Guidelines for Checklist

A few additional refinements will make the formal checklist a first-class reference item. If the pages are categorized in some way, a brief index of the ordering at the front of the book is a useful memory refresher when looking up a title. Index tabs can be inserted—although they make the book more bulky. It is also essential to note one's name and address in the front of the checklist in case one accidentally leaves it behind somewhere. In the same vein, occasionally photocopying the pages and storing these back-up copies could be invaluable if ever the book is lost; most of the information would then still exist and the list could be reconstructed with a minimum of trouble.

A special problem arises for collectors of long, variable-content numerical series of comics such as the well-known Dell Four Color/One-Shot sequence. Many Dell titles do not start at #1 but rather commence where the Four Colors stop; for example, most of the low number westerns do not exist *per se* but are represented by Four Color issues. For this reason, collectors who seek these titles should plan on leaving these early numbers blank in their main checklist and setting up a special section for Four Colors.

On some titles a collector for one reason or another may *want* duplicate issues. Double or multiple spacing of lines can allow for an arbitrary number of copies of a single issue, checklisted individually by grade.

Sooner or later, all collectors will encounter certain items which do not adapt well to positional notation: comics without numbers, special comics from long sequences not otherwise collected, foreign editions, etc. Such off-beat items are best documented by maintaining a few blank sheets in the checklist book headed "Miscellaneous," and describing these unusual items in full.

Summary

Getting together a very high quality checklist which reflects the precise situation of your comic collection can be done at little cost and with relatively little effort. After the collection has been initially recorded (possibly a large job, but probably not an unpleasant one for rainy afternoons or weekends), new comics acquired can be noted by merely entering one letter or picture in the appropriate box. The list will always be up to date and because of the looseleaf feature, if the titles are well-spaced, new titles or changed collecting interests can be incorporated into the book as simple additions or minor revisions; complete overhauls of the layout will seldom if ever be necessary. And all comic conditions will always be available.

My system is very efficient and leads to a minimum of errors. The most useful special feature of my approach, perhaps, is that the tedious task of writing out all the actual numbers need never be undertaken.

Maintaining a checklist for larger comic collections has become essential, as a result of the vast number and variety of comics that have been issued over the years. Furthermore, at today's high prices, collectors cannot afford to buy duplicates in error. A good checklist should enhance a collector's feeling of being organized and give him some "feel" for what his present position is and where he is headed in this captivating comic book hobby.

The purpose of this article was to provide a comprehensive overview of what I believe is the best approach to comic book checklisting. Even if all readers do not agree 100% with my views, I'm sure that they will have picked up at least a few useful ideas. ■

PERTWILLABY PAPERS

by Don Rosa and Ron Weinberg

This issue presents the concluding episodes of Lancelot Pertwillaby's strips as published in the 1971 *Kentucky Kernel*. We started our reprint series in issue #2 of *Collector's Dream*, and they have appeared in serial order in consecutive issues ever since.

EPISODE 48: AS YOU RECALL LANCE IS IN FLIGHT FROM A SURLY CROWD — NOW ON WITH THE ACTION!
"COME, LANCE!" TO ONE OF MY FALL OUT SHELTERS! WE'LL BE SAFE THERE FROM ANYTHING SHORT OF A DIRECT HIT FROM A RUSSKI A BOMB!
MOMENTS LATER:
LANCE... THIS IS A SERIOUS MATTER! WITH THIS UNIVERSITY AT A FEVER PITCH WE CAN'T KEEP YOU AROUND HERE IF THERE'S ANY DOUBT OF YOUR ENROLLMENT.
FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY I HOPE THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT OPENS AT THE ONE MONTH MARK IF IT DOESN'T OPEN THEN, TO PROVE YOUR ENROLLMENT LANCE WE'LL HAVE TO ASK YOU TO LEAVE FOR YOUR OWN PROTECTION.
I'LL LEAVE YOU TO THINK THIS OUT I'D BETTER GO BACK AND PUT OUT THE FIRE IN THE INCINERATOR!
NEXT EPISODE: A CONFESSION!
EPISODE 49: WHEN WE LEFT OFF LAST TIME, OUR BROKEN HERO WAS ALONE WITH FEATHER IN ADRIAN MORPHOUS' FALL OUT SHELTER....
FEATHER, I GUESS I'D BETTER GET THIS OFF MY CHEST! WHAT ROATCH SAYS IS TRUE — I'M NOT REALLY ENROLLED HERE AT THE UNIVERSITY.
OH, LANCEY, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
WELL, IF THE SAFE OPENS, THEY'LL CONFIRM THE ABSENCE OF MY RECORDS. AND IF IT DOESN'T OPEN DR. MORPHOUS SAYS HELL EXPELL ME FOR MY OWN WELL BEING!
MY ONLY SALVATION IS TO GET INTO THAT VAULT AND PLANT FORGED RECORDS — BUT 1968 MODEL OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULTS ARE IMPENETRABLE!
I'LL TAKE A SMOOTH OPERATOR TO CRACK THAT SAFE.
SMOOTH OPERATOR? WHAT THE ANGELS?!?
LET'S GET — OF HERE!
A-A-A HMM! THAT DOESN'T MUST BE A REAL TIGER!
WHAT HOPPENS IN THE BEGINNING GIVEN OUR HERO?
EPISODE 50: LANCE HAS JUST TAKEN FEATHER HOME — AFTER A SHORT PREPERATION IS ABOUT TO LAUNCH AN ATTACK ON THE OSO TITANIUM YOU-KNOW-WHAT!
BUT OF COURSE... I CAN USE MY ANTI-ABRASIUM TO DE-FRICTIONIZE THE INTERNAL COMPONENTS OF THE DOUBLE-DUTY OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT LOCK!
I'D BEST BE CAREFUL; AN ELITE PATROL OF CAMPUS GUARDS STALKS THE AREA AFTER SUNSET SOMETIMES THEY EVEN HAVE DOGS....
I'LL SIMPLY RELEASE THE VAPORS AND ALLOW THEM TO SEEP INTO THE INTERSTICES OF THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT LOCK MECHANISM
WITHOUT ANY FRICTION THE SLIGHTEST PRESSURE ON THE DOOR HANDLE WILL CAUSE THE TUMBLERS TO SLIDE UP & OVER EACH OTHER — ALLOWING THE LOCK TO OPEN BEFORE THE PRESENT TIME
NEXT EPISODE: INTO THE SLOGAN DEPTHS!

EPISODE 51: AS YOU RECALL, WE LEFT OFF AS LANCE WAS USING HIS ANTI-ABRASIUM TO "DE-FRICTIONIZE" THE INCREMENTS OF THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT LOCK...

AH, SUCCESS... HOWEVER MY ANTI-ABRASIUM SEEMS TO HAVE SUBLIMATED ENTIRELY .... THERE IS NONE LEFT...!

MY GOODNESS... THE DEPTHS OF STYGIAN DARKNESS... AND ME WITHOUT MY PORTABLE INCANDESCENCE! I SIMPLY CAN'T TAKE THE TIME TO SEARCH OUT THE MAIN LIGHTING SWITCHES

CLIC CLAK CLIC CLAK CLI

THE FILE CABINETS SEEM TO BE IN THIS AREA... NOW IF I CAN ONLY FIND THE PRECISE LOCATION FOR THESE REGISTRATION TRANSCRIPTS.

SCROOT

CLIC CLAK

THE P's SEEM TO BE LOCATED HERE... LET'S SEE— PASTA, PEROLIA, PERTMAN... IN ALL THIS OBSCURITY, THIS IS ABOUT AS CLOSE AS I CAN GET TO THE PROPER LOCATION.

CHUNK

NEXT TIME: ESCAPE!?

EPISODE 52: IN THE DARKNESS OF THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT LANCE HAS PLACED HIS FORGED RECORDS NEAREST AS POSSIBLE TO THE PROPER LOCALE...

NOW TO GET QUIETLY OUT OF THE VAULT AND SNEAK AWAY UNNOTICED INTO THE DEPTHS OF NIGHT.

CLAK CLIC CLA

I MUST STEAL PAST THE GUARDS... THOSE POLICE DOGS ARE RUMORED TO BE BRED RABID FROM BIRTH...

AND AS THE SUN RISES OVER THE CAMPUS

WELL, TIME FOR BREAKFAST FEATHER DID YOU SLEEP WELL?

AS WELL AS EXPECTED. I WISH MY ROOMMATE AND HER BOYFRIEND WOULD OBEY OPEN HOUSE SCHEDULES...

AH, MY LITTLE STRUMPET... ONCE AGAIN I HAVE WITTINGLY FAILED TO PICK UP MY MEAL BOOK.

OH, THAT'S ALRIGHT! .. THE SEMESTER'S ALMOST OVER ANYWAY...

MEAL TICKETS

TO BE CONTINUED...

EPISODE 53: AS YOU RECALL, WE LEFT OFF AS LANCE & FEATHER WERE HAVING THEIR MORNING REFECTION...

YOU'LL NEVER GUESS WHAT I DID LAST NIGHT, FEATHER

I BET YOU BROKE INTO THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT USING SOME ANTI-ABRASIUM AND IN THE DARKNESS MANAGED TO PLACE FORGED REGISTRATION RECORDS INTO THE SEEMINGLY PROPER FILE.

FEATHER... I DON'T APPRECIATE YOUR HEAVY-HANDED HUMOR.

MY SITUATION IS BAD ENOUGH... THE RECORDS MAY BE THERE BUT IT'S ALL FRUITLESS IF THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT LOCK DOESN'T OPEN AT THE ONE MONTH MARK... AND I HAVE NO MORE ANTI-ABRASIUM TO HELP PRES. MORPHOUS OPEN IT.

AND THAT ONE MONTH MARK IS TOMORROW AT 1:46 P.M. STANDARD TIME. I'LL BET THAT'S ONE EVENT SMYTE AND ROATCH WON'T WANT TO MISS...

MONDAY: → THE BIG DAY! HAPPY THANKSGIVING!

EPISODE 54: IT'S THE DAY THAT WILL DECIDE LANCE'S COLLEGE CAREER WILL THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT TIME LOCK OPEN TODAY OR NOT?

WELL, TODAY'S THE BIG DAY... I WONDER IF THERE WILL BE MANY PEOPLE ON HAND WAITING TO SEE IF THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT OPENS OR NOT.

MEN AND WOMEN'S PROGRAMS

GET A FREE T-SHIRT HERE!

WELL, I GUESS THE NEXT FEW MOMENTS WILL DECIDE MY FATE HERE AT THE UNIVERSITY.

I'M AFRAID SO LANCE... 'OOOO HOO HOO. ACCORDING TO MY CAPT. VIDEO ASTRO WATCH WE HAVE ABOUT 2 MINUTES.

THIS TIME VE CANNOT FAIL, MINE FREUND.

YES; IF THE SAFE OPENS HIS RUSE WILL BE EXPOSED, AND IF IT FAILS TO UNLOCK PERTWILLABY MUST LEAVE, NONETHELESS!

CONTINUED...

EPISODE 55: AS THE MOMENT OF THE POSSIBLE OPENING OF THE SAFE NEARS, PARANOIA & MALTRUST GRIP THE CAMPUS POPULACE AROUND THE VAULT IN PERFECTLY NORMAL MANIFESTATIONS..

DO YOU THINK LANCE PERTWILLABY COULD BE A NARC?!

COULD BE. IT WOULD BE A FUGGIN' SHAME THOUGH! I REALLY GROOVED ON 'IM!

PHILMONT, COULD OUR STAR PUPIL HAVE DECEIVED US!

MAY BE; ON TOP OF IT ALL HE MIGHT HAVE A GRANT FROM A RIVAL UNIVERSITY.

I DON'T FEEL JOSEPHINE IS SAFE IN THE DORM ANYMORE; I HEARD SOMEBODY SAY THIS PERTWIBBALER GUY'S A MEMBER OF SOME WEIRD SEX CULT!

I HEARD THIS PERTWILLABY WAS BORN IN RUSSIA!

OH NO! I HEARD HE'S A HOSTILE ALIEN FROM URANUS!

WEDNESDAY: THE VAULT OPENS?!?!

EPISODE 56: THE CROWD AROUND THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT GROWS RESTLESS AS THE INSTANT OF THE POSSIBLE OPENING ARRIVES P.T.P....

WELL MEN... IT'S 1:46 P.M. AND THE VAULT DID NOT OPEN! I FEAR THAT..

KLIC!

TOMORROW: INTO THE FILES!?!?

EPISODE 57: LAST TIME AS YOU RECALL, WE WITNESSED THE OPENING OF THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT..

TO THE FILES, MEN!

AH CAN'T SEEM TO FIND MISTAH PERTWILLABY'S FILE, DOCTAH MO'PHOUS.

THEY CAN'T FIND HIS FILES!

WHAT ARE YOU PEOPLE DOING!?

TOMORROW: A LYNCHING?!?

EPISODE 58: WHEN LANCE'S RECORDS ARE NOT FOUND ON FILE, AN ACRIMONIOUS MOB PREPARES TO RUSTICATE OUR HAPLESS HERO TO THE HEREAFTER.....

QUICK, EXHAUST EVERY POSSIBILITY ... LANCE'S FILE HAS TO BE HERE SOMEWHERE!

HEAH IT IS, DOCTAH MO'PHOUS. SOMEHOW IT WAS MISPLACED INTO THE COED RECORD SECTION!

LANCELOT PERTWILLABY

WE'VE FOUND IT!

YOU PEOPLE HAD ME A BIT APPREHENSIVE THERE FOR A MOMENT.

THUD!

TO BE CONTINUED...

EPISODE 59: PRESIDENT MORPHOUS HAS LOCATED THE REGISTRATION RECORDS THAT LANCE PLANTED IN THE OSO TITANIUM TIME LOCK VAULT!

LANCE, WE'VE FOUND YOUR RECORDS!!! YOU'RE CLEARED! COMPLETELY EXONERATED!
THIS PERTWILLABY AIN'T A NARC! HE'S GA-ROOOVY!
KNEW IT ALL ALONG...
HOW COULD YOU POSSIBLY HAVE DOUBTED LANCE, DR. PHLASK!? I'M ASHAMED OF YOU.
OFFICIAL NATIONAL GUARD TARGET
THIS PERTWILLABY WOULD BE A GOOD CATCH FOR OUR DAUGHTER JOSEPHINE.
I CAN SEE THE WEDDING RECEPTION NOW.
LANCE PERTWILLABY— 100% AMERICAN!
GOD BLESS AMERICA!!!

TO BE CONTINUED...

EPISODE 60: ROATCH & SMYTE'S PLAN TO EXPOSE LANCE HAS ENDED IN PERDITION... AND OL' V.D. SEEKS TO KNOW WHEREFORE...

I DO NOT UNDERSTANDT ZIS, ROATCH... YOU TELL ME A MAN IS NOT ENROLLED — UND YET HERE ARE ZIS MAN'S REKORDS! HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN YOURSELF?
ER — WELL — WE WERE ONLY MAKING ASSUMPTIONS DR. SMYTE, SIR... I'M NOT GOING TO TAKE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR...
"ONLY FOLLOWING ORDERS", EH? ZAT DID NOT VORK FOR ME UND IT VILL NOT VORK FOR YOU!!
CONGRATULATIONS LANCE, BOY!
WE WERE WITH YOU ALL THE WAY!!
ATTA BOY LANCE!

MORE TO COME! (IT AIN'T OVER YET.)

EPISODE 61: CONGRATULATIONS SEEM TO BE IN ORDER FOR LANCE'S WEATHERING THE STORM...

NEXT EPISODE: SCHNIER & SMYTE ROT ANEW!

EPISODE 62: WITH FINALS APPROACHING THE SEMESTER IS WINDING DOWN LIKE AN INDO-CHINESE WAR... BUT THE CONVOLUTED EXISTENCES OF OUR DRAMATIS PERSONAE CONTINUE...

Don Rosa
GRUNT GRUMBLE GRUNT
ER... MAY I SEE YOU FOR A MOMENT PROF. SMYTE, SIR? I'M STILL CERTAIN THAT-
HOOP!
AS CERTAIN AS YOU VER BEFORE, HERR ROATCH?? MINE ROLE IN YOUR SCHEME HAS KOST ME ENOUGH ALREADY... I HAFF BEEN PUT ON FAKULTY PROBATION, MINE SALARY IS A MERE SHADOW OF ITS FORMER SELF, UND MINE TENURE HAS VANISHED LIKE DER REICH!
UND YOU HAFF NOT BENEFITTED FROM ZIS DISASTER EITHER, HERR ROATCH...
WH... WHAT DO YOU MEAN, SIR?
SUDDENLY YOU SEEM TO BE MAKING STRAIGHT E'S IN ALL MINE KOURSES!

DON'T MISS TOMORROW!!! A FINAL TWIST!

EPISODE 63; AS SCHYLER TRIES TO REINSTATE HIMSELF WITH PROFESSOR SMYTE, AN UNEXPECTED TURN OF EVENTS IS ABOUT TO TRANSPIRE...
BUT I BEG YOUR INDULGENCE, OOOP!
SHHH! QVIET... HERR PER-TVILLABY IS COMING BY...
FLOOP!
... OH HOW I DREAD TAKING ALL THOSE FINALS, LANCE. IT SURE WOULD BE NICE IF I COULD BE UNEN-ROLLED LIKE YOU!
YES, ONE OF THE FRUITS OF MY BEING UNREGISTERED.
PAYING TUITION, ROOM & BOARD, etc., WOULD BE BAD ENOUGH. BUT FEATHER I DON'T HAVE TO PROVE MYSELF TO THE PRE-CEPTORS IN TESTS OR EVEN FINALS!
REMEMBER. IF I DIDN'T PERPETRATE THIS RUSE I COULDN'T EVEN THINK OF AFFORDING THE COSTS OF ATTENDANCE!
MONDAY: A VOW OF VENGEANCE!
EPISODE 64; PROFESSOR SMYTE & ROATCH HAVE JUST EAVESDROPPED ON AN UNEQUIVOCAL AVOWAL OF LANCE'S STATE OF UNPAID UNENROLLMENT!
VE HAFF STRUKK GOLD, MINE KOMRAD!
I TOLD YOU, PROFESSOR SMYTE — I TOLD YOU MY SUSPICIONS WERE VALID!
ALL ZIS HUMILIATION HE HAS KAUSED... NOT TO MENTION MY KUT IN SALARY UND LOSS UV TENURE... HE VILL PAY FOR ZIS MANY TIMES OVER, MEIN FREUND!
NOW ZAT AT LEAST VE ARE CERTAIN UV HIS RUSE VE VILL MAKE ZIS PERTVILLABY SUFFER! DO YOU KNOW VHAT PROJERT I HAFF IN MIND?
NO... NOT THAT... ...YOU... YOU COULDN'T MEAN....
YESSSS...
TO BE CONTINUED...
EPISODE 65; AS YOU RECALL, LAST TIME WE LEFT OFF AT LANCE'S APARTMENT...
HOLEY MOLEY, RON... HOW ARE WE GONNA OUTDO OURSELVES NEXT SEMESTER? WE'VE BUILT THE EXCITEMENT UP TO A FEVER PITCH!
"FEVER PITCH," DON? YEAH, THE WHOLE UNIVERSITY'S SICK OF IT BY NOW!
BUT SERIOUSLY, WEINBERG... NEXT SEMESTER I FORESEE A CIRCUMLOQUITIOUS, TENUOS, ARDOUS, NASTY JOURNEY IN LANCE'S FUTURE.
HEY... WHO'S SUPPOSED TO BE WRITING THIS ANYHOW?
NEVER MIND THAT... LANCE AND THE GANG — PLUS SOME NEW CHARACTERS — WILL END UP IN THE DARKEST JUNGLES OF THE AMAZON! LOTS MORE REAL ACTION & SUSPENSE!
WHAT ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS FOR — WE WROTE IT ALL LAST NIGHT!
OH, YEAH.
DID ANY-ONE EVER TELL YOU YOU LOOK LIKE LANCE PERTWILLABY?
DROP DEAD RON
TO BE CONTINUED NEXT SEMESTER!

It was our original intention to continue reprinting *Pertwillaby Papers* from episode #66 and up. However, it has dawned on us that we would only be duplicating material readily available in the fan press, because the issues of *Rocket's Blast/Comicollector* which reprinted them are at most a few years old. Therefore, we regretfully bid farewell to Lance, Prof. Smyte, Feather, A. Morphous and Schuyler Roatch, and we urge readers to pick up *Collector's Dream* #2-4 and *Rocket's Blast/Comicollector* #117-120, 130-135, 137, 138, and 140-143, which carry all the remaining episodes.